

Has the Armed Forces Covenant Made a Difference to Merchant Navy & RFA Veterans?

28th October 2019





The Institute of Public Care

- We are part of Oxford Brookes University
- We work with our clients to deliver better health and social care outcomes
- We use our professional experience and academic rigour to drive improvement and innovation, and to generate new learning for the benefit of people, organisations and communities

Recognition for veterans



Members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy deserve recognition for their service to their country in successive conflicts. All those who have served on a civilian vessel whilst it was supporting HM Armed Forces are recognised as veterans. It is therefore appropriate that this group is recognised and supported by the Armed Forces Covenant. This is a sign of the nation's gratitude

Mark Lancaster MP, Minister for Personnel & Veterans

What did we look for?



How much do we know about the experiences of the Merchant Navy veteran population and the kind of lives they live today?

Has the experience of conflict had an impact on their health and wellbeing?

What are veterans' needs and aspirations?

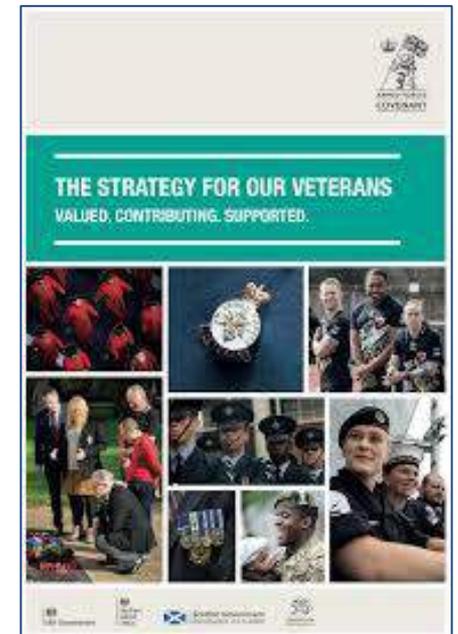
How are they currently supported in communities? How does this compare with Ex Armed Forces and public sector services?

What kind of services do we need for the future?

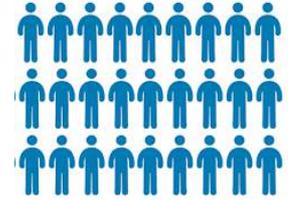
Who are our veterans?



.. anyone who has served for at least one day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations



Who are our veterans?



- Although no authoritative records, likely there are 245,000+ former seafarers from the Merchant Navy and fishing fleets - around 11,500 are 85+ years in age in the UK
- Number of veterans over 85 likely to almost triple over the next 15-20 years
- Movement across seafaring industries further complicates understanding of the population size

Our research cohort

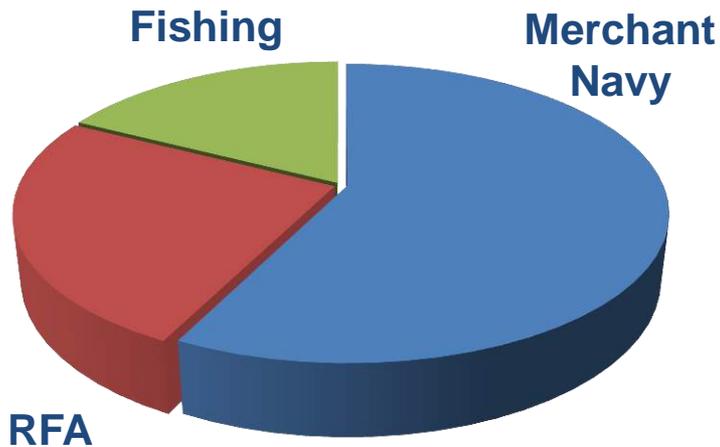


85 +	19%	87
75 - 84 years	33%	149
65 - 74 years	34%	153
Less than 65	15%	66

SE England	85
Scotland	68
NW England	68
Yorks & Humber	53
NE England	48
SW England	40
Wales	29
East of England	24
Other inc. Australia, USA, Canada	21
Midlands	12



Our research cohort



Movement across industries

Some had land-based jobs

**Others at sea all their working lives
(59% of interviewees)**

**Majority worked as seamen (43% of
interviewees) or in catering & hospitality (32.8%)**

Our Cohort in Conflict





59% of interviewees served in the Falklands compared with 39% of survey respondents

	Survey	Interviews	Total
Falklands	153	34	187
Gulf	71	1	78
Aden	49	7	56
Nth Ireland	50	2	52
Suez	40	3	43
WWII	37	2	39
Cyprus	34	4	38
Malaya	34	2	36
Iraq	24	2	26
Iceland	15	7	22
Korea	19	3	22
Balkans	21	0	21
Borneo	20	0	20
Sierra Leone	19	0	19
India	17	1	18
Vietnam	11	4	15
Palestine	11	0	11
Kenya	10	0	10
Afghanistan	7	0	7
Burma	4	0	4

Our cohort in conflict



Carrying troops or supplies
Minesweeping, Medical support
Firefighting & towing
Evacuating civilians
Carrying fuel, Carrying arms

The horror of seeing thousands of holocaust survivors attempting to reach Palestine .. while being prevented from doing so by the Forces ..

I thought when soldiers blacked their faces up, that was just in Hollywood films, didn't know they did that in real life. And there they all was .. it dawned on me then .. this is bother, this is trouble. That brought it home

66% of interviewees directly exposed to conflict





45% of interviewees described the impact of *conflict* on their mental health, only 15% on physical health

However ..

52% reported the physical impact of *seafaring in general* compared with only 21% on mental health

Only 4.4% of survey respondents reported impact of *conflict* on their mental health

once all the paras had gone, the whole ship went flat .. I suffered a bit from post-traumatic stress where it's silent. When I'm at home, if my wife is out I have the radio on, I can't bear silence

The consultant up at Leicester said you're 50-odd but your back's 80, and he put that down to being at sea



7% of interviewees described their battle with alcohol addiction

One third of casework veterans developed Diabetes Type 2 which they said was a result of a seafaring lifestyle including alcohol abuse



I'm just falling to pieces really .. that's all through drinking and abuse of alcohol, which was my fault, I can't blame anyone for that, it's just one of those things and like I say, now I don't drink like I used to but one time I was drinking 3 bottles of spirits a day

Spouses were affected too

My wife seems to have absorbed it all

I was like a single parent and have been depressed and anxious

Veterans' lives today .. and needs





Their support networks



Nautilus

Merchant Navy Assoc.

NHS

**Fishermen/Seafarer
missions**

SSAFA

RN Patrol Service

Blind Veterans Association

Council (inc. home care)

Fisherman's Union (sic)

**Shipwrecked Mariner's
Society**



54% of veterans live alone, 46% are married

40% of casework veterans recently widowed

**38% of interviewees with informal support
mainly through family (40%) and friends
(29%). Only 18% have formal support**

**75.9% in contact with seafaring community
through organisations/networks**

46.5% described ongoing friendships

**Veterans living alone at least 20%
more than general 65+ population
(54% compared with 33%). Similar
differences for numbers married
(46% compared with 60%)**

Their challenges

- 64% of veterans struggle with physical health
- One third of casework veterans struggle with walking and another third socialising. 20% of their challenges related to emotional wellbeing - prone to depression & anxiety, 2 had had suicidal thoughts 
- Almost a third face financial challenges, 20% mentioned housing problems

When I had a brain clot, I did nothing for the first time in my life .. I've got bad angina, had a bypass. Had a heart attack in '98, another clot in '99 .. still a bit weak on that side and my balance isn't good. I've just had an aneurism in my belly stented so I'm getting better from that, going to get my knee done

The physical & mental consequences of seafaring can compound similar issues related to the ageing process

28% scored 'Wellbeing' on the lower side - depression, anxiety and ill health are predominant issues

Other 72% described their "resilience" despite challenges, many are regular visitors to seafaring clubs

Despite physical & emotional issues 78% scored 'Health' highly, often saying they *"just had to get on with it" or "don't like to complain"*

Frequent display of stoicism and pride

41% found having someone else to contact and talk to when they needed help most valuable. 50% said financial support

Outcome Area	5 Very good	4 Quite good	3 Satisfactory	2 Poor	1 Very poor
Finance	50%	28%	0%	11%	11%
Housing	68%	17%	5%	5%	5%
Health	28%	50%	17%	0%	5%
Wellbeing	55%	17%	11%	0%	11%

Their identity



Whilst most are aware of their veteran status and have the Veteran Badge, not all interviewees self-identify as such

On the other hand ... some felt strongly that more support and recognition was needed

Being in a couple of things like that, compared to .. you know.. I go to the veterans club and listen to them .. what I went through was nothing... they are the real veterans. I feel guilt about having it

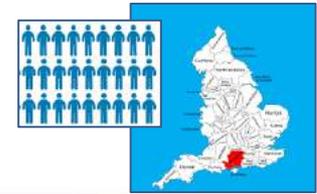
We don't want much, a little more of the same 'well done', 'cause when you look back, I'm like being big-headed, but if it wasn't for the men on that ship, the war could never have been pulled off

Could stoicism explain low numbers (18%) seeking support from services?

How have services responded? Service review exercise



What do we know about the population?



Consistent view that the MN Veteran population is not readily identifiable or distinct

Individuals seeking support rarely present as MN Veterans

One large provider estimated MN Veterans account for 2% of the service user population

Agreed MN Veterans have a range of familiar presenting issues:

- **Loneliness**
- **Addictions**
- **Housing and homelessness**
- **Debt**
- **Physical and mental health problems**

What services did we find?



Good supply of specialist services for *military* veterans

BUT

Majority of services *don't mention or reach out to Merchant Navy* veterans

Local authorities signed up to Armed Forces Covenant:

- raising awareness among serving personnel, reservists and veterans of local authority support they can access
- wider understanding of the needs of the local veteran population and serving personnel during transition to civilian life
- Hampshire CC embedding support for armed forces in mainstream services

What services did we find?



- VOS drop-ins regularly bring together around 40 provider organisations
- HIVE Portsmouth a shared endeavour of Portsmouth City Council, NHS Portsmouth CCG and Portsmouth VCSE organisations – *“a collective of organisations dedicated to building stronger, more connected communities.”*
- Portsmouth Military Mental Health Alliance, through an Armed Forces Covenant award, is funding a 2 year programme to support veterans’ mental health & wellbeing

*If you're a veteran,
there's no better place to
get support than in the
Solent Region*

Access to support is inconsistent

44% of casework veterans identified through seafaring networks / clubs



- Veterans are most likely to access support via drop-ins and clubs, such as those offered by VOS and Age UK
- Those with dual service histories may approach military charities such as RNRMC
- Sometimes referrals through Fisherman's Mission, SSAFA, Nautilus, Shipwrecked Mariners' volunteers, Citizens' Advice Bureau, housing charities and hospital social workers
- Most referrals are older, often struggling with bills on low pensions. Sometimes they have been refused financial support by local authorities
- Veterans often require help at a time of more acute need or crisis, many are reluctant to seek help earlier

*I was just doing my job
I'm used to coping
I don't like to complain*



Issues with the ‘veteran’ identity

The term ‘veteran’ is a “nuisance” and likely to have impact on how people identify and self-refer:

- Seafarers have the sea in common, and therefore veterans may identify with Royal Navy counterparts
- Unclear when and how Armed Forces Covenant applies
- Meaning of “veteran” is different for the armed forces compared to the Merchant Navy

Barriers to collaboration

Caseworkers described challenge identifying veterans due to “self-protectionism” of agencies



- Knowledge gaps
- Lack of information sharing
- Budget constraints
- Tight funding criteria
- Difficulties with the definition of veteran
- Little read-across with adult social care assessment staff and processes, and with local authority housing services

So has the Armed Forces Covenant made a difference?



Has it made a difference?

Greater awareness of veteran status

BUT

Still work to do ..

- for both *generic* and *specialist* services
- identifying true extent of the population
- improving access and ‘reaching’ veterans
- supporting collaboration and sharing information between agencies, particularly military/ maritime
- focussing on transition?
- clarity about the ‘veteran’ definition?
- Universal veterans’ ID card?



What now?

Preferred support	Survey
Services for veterans	22%
Services for seafarers	56%
Universal services	12%
Family and friends	49%
Local Authority	24%
NHS	40%

Specialist services?
 Emotional support - depression, anxiety & PTSD relating to seafaring not just conflict
 Support / guidance to manage alcohol and healthy lifestyle
 Opportunities for contact with seafarer community

Relationships based on trust & rapport
Face-to-face conversations
Time to build rapport
A "local lad"
Someone at the end of the phone

Generic older people services?
 Emotional support for bereavement or caring role
 Support for their carer or spouse
 Financial advice and support
 Housing support – adaptations & home improvements
 Physical support

Support for my daughter
Stairlift for the wife
Help to look after wife financially
Help with alcohol temptation
More financial support
New carpets, bigger house
Local amenities
Move back to London
Better transport

Questions for the audience



- Does our analysis ring true?
- Do you have your own examples to share?
- What additional things would you propose?



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