

# Snapshot

## Criminal Justice System Bullets

The attached is a summary of the Criminal Justice System Snapshot, accessible on the Veterans & Families Research Hub [<https://www.vfrhub.com/>]. Information correct as at 16.12.20.

- Estimates have suggested that between 3.4-4% of the UK's prison population are veterans, and research conducted between 2011-2017 indicated veterans are 30% less likely to be in prison compared to civilians.
- Compared to non-veterans, research also indicated veterans in the CJS were predominantly male, white British and aged over 30. Offences classed as violence against the person were the most prevalent among veterans.
- Recent research suggested that poor social, health and economic conditions — exacerbated by the recent emergence of COVID-19 — were strong risk factors for offending among veterans.
- The reversal of these risks (e.g. financial stability, stable accommodation, relationship stability) can reduce the risk of offending among veterans and help decrease the likelihood of mental health problems.
- A study published in 2018 concluded that the mental health support needs of veterans in custody are like those of the civilian prison population except that PTSD and depression are most common among veterans in prison with mental health concerns, as opposed to depression and anxiety among non-veteran inmates. However, different research published in the same year concluded that veterans in the CJS were more likely to be diagnosed with mental disorders than non-veterans, with anxiety and depression appearing as the most common issues.
- The 2014 Phillips Review highlighted the need to properly identify the reasons for ex-Service personnel ending up in the CJS and to identify areas where support is needed. Since January 2015, every prisoner going through the custody process should be asked if they have ever served in the Armed Forces (AF). Ex-Service people involved in the CJS may not wish to identify their AF connections, due to a sense of shame or embarrassment, or fear of reprisal.
- In Wales, veterans are identified as a priority group within the All Wales Criminal Justice Board's Reducing Reoffending Strategy. The Welsh government has provided a guide to the formal identification and verification process. The Scottish Armed Forces and Veterans Champion Scheme has developed a referral service where every individual presenting at a police station in Scotland is asked if they are a veteran and if it is appropriate, they are referred for support and signposting.
- There are several pre-service indicators that make personnel more vulnerable to follow or continue on an anti-social behaviour trajectory: males from socially, economically and educationally deprived backgrounds; those who had seen or had trauma or violence and/or spent

time in local authority care at some point in their lives; and those with a history of drug or alcohol issues and/or criminal behaviour prior to enlisting. There are also those who experience difficulties arising in military service, such as PTSD and alcohol misuse. These problems may or may not have been the reason for discharge.

● Research published in 2011 suggested there are no simple explanations as to why individuals who have served in the AF commit offences after they have left. However, it indicated three factors which occurred frequently in the accounts of offending of those interviewed: 1) social isolation and exclusion, including unemployment, low income, sub-standard housing, a high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown; 2) alcohol - particularly when associated with violent offences; and, 3) financial problems after leaving the AF.

● A veteran's first contact with the police creates an opportunity for intervention by an appropriate service provider, with charities such as Project Nova offering support tailored towards their needs and circumstances.

● Two Welsh prisons have established dedicated veteran wings providing bespoke support and peer mentoring services. Peer support has been indicated as beneficial when dealing with veteran offenders.

● Veterans can often be reluctant to ask for help when in prison; a situation which reportedly could be improved by ensuring that prison staff have an awareness and understanding of military issues. The establishment of Veterans in Custody Support Officers (VICSOs) in some prisons can provide this, but the quality and availability of that support is variable. Improvement and expansion is recommended, as VICSOs aim to identify offenders in a custodial setting who have served in the AF, and offer and organise support.

● The Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) provides 'corrective' training for military personnel sentenced to periods of detention, rather than serving as a prison. There are three categories of detainees: those who are to remain in the AF at the end of their detention, those who are to be discharged after serving their sentence and are released as civilians from there, and those held in military custody either awaiting the outcome of an investigation or awaiting placement at a prison or Young Offenders Institution. These groups of detainees are separated throughout their detention, and up to 264 detainees can be held in MCTC at any one time.

● Veterans in the CJS remain a significant minority of the total prison population, as well as the entire ex-Service population in the UK. However, it will be some time before all recommendations made in the Phillips Review will have been fully implemented. The expansion of veteran-focused CJS services remains inconsistent and there is some way to go before effective public, charity and private co-ordination is achieved. Some support, particularly around mental health provision, will require a full national strategy.

● Additionally, it appears there remains very little support for families of veterans in the CJS, and certain groups appear to be at a disadvantage in accessing support for veterans in the CJS (e.g., women).