

Local Government and Communities Committee

Homelessness

Submission from Combat Stress

Below we have briefly presented some of the evidence in reference to the needs of veterans with complex mental health difficulties. There is a suggestion that veterans are over-represented in the homeless community, with many experiencing complex mental health needs.

Combat Stress is a national mental health charity operating across the UK with a residential treatment centre in Ayr and community teams across Scotland. We have recently conducted two relevant research studies exploring the needs of veterans with complex mental health needs.

The first of these explored experiences of multiple deprivation in treatment seeking veterans. We looked at these experiences across the UK and found that Scottish veterans had the highest risk of residing in areas of higher deprivation compared to those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Murphy et al 2017). We explored risk factors for deprivation and found that men, younger individuals, those living in urban areas (vs rural) and taking longer to engage with support services had the highest risk of suffering from deprivation. Data from this study suggests that veterans residing in Scotland, could be at increased risk of deprivation and therefore issues around homelessness.

The second study we have conducted explored the mental health needs of treatment seeking veterans and whether these differed depending on the nation veterans reside in (Murphy et al 2017). Overall our results suggest that treatment seeking veterans have complex mental health needs. Approximately 80% met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The majority of those suffering from PTSD also have a range of co-morbidities including anxiety & depression, problems with anger and alcohol problems. These are complex mental health presentations and if left untreated considerably increase the risk of social exclusion and homelessness (Iverson et al 2005).

We then stratified by the nation in the UK in which veterans reside. Overall, there were few differences in mental health presentations (Ashwick 2017). However, a higher proportion of Scottish veterans were drinking at levels indicating harmful drinking that those living in England. This suggests that additional resources may be needed to help support these individuals, especially because of the association between homelessness and substance misuse.

References

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