

Ex-service personnel should get priority NHS treatment, says survey

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The British public widely supports priority NHS health care for former members of the Armed Forces, and most believe that existing services for them are not adequate, new research shows.

The British Sociological Association's annual conference in London heard today (Friday 5 April 2013) that more than two-thirds of the British public agree that Armed Forces members still needing treatment for illness or injuries after they leave service should get priority.

Rachael Gribble, of the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR), King's College London, told the conference that only 25% of those interviewed thought that ex-Service personnel with a mental illness or injury should not get priority health treatment, and only 29% thought those with a physical illness or injury should not get priority treatment.

Ms Gribble worked with Professor Sir Simon Wessely, Professor Christopher Dandeker and Dr Nicola Fear, of KCMHR, and Professor Susan Klein and Professor David Alexander, of the Aberdeen Centre for Trauma Research, Robert Gordon University, during the study.

In an analysis of 3,311 responses to the 2011 British Social Attitudes survey, the researchers also found that:

- 90% of people polled agreed that ex-Service personnel should be compensated for physical or mental illness or injury related to their military duties
- this fell to 16% who agreed that ex-Service personnel should be compensated for illness or injury which was not directly related to military duties
- 64% thought that compensation paid for mental illness incurred during service should be the same as for physical illness or injury, and 33% thought it should be more. Only 3% thought it should be less.
- 63% of people said they knew a current or former member of the armed forces.

Ms Gribble told the conference: "Current health and welfare provision for ex-Service personnel with mental or physical injuries was considered to be insufficient by the majority of the public when contrasted with civilian services.

"Priority health and welfare services for ex-service personnel were supported by at least 70% of respondents.

"Support for compensation for ex-Service personnel injured as a direct result of their military duties is high but there is little support for payments to those who sustained injuries in non-military circumstances.

“Our findings suggest that the British public regard health and welfare provision for veterans to be less than they should be. These attitudes may be an inadvertent result of fundraising campaigns from military charities or recent media reports and documentaries referring to the lack of resources for serving personnel, particularly the wounded.

“Recent commitments to health and welfare improvements for ex-Service personnel suggest that this is a pivotal political issue, especially during this time of economic austerity.

“The high levels of public support for compensation for injuries sustained as part of military duties, and for equivalence between reparation physical and mental injury suggest that the public is supportive of reparation for military injuries as currently occurs under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS).”

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Notes:

The 2013 British Sociological Association annual conference is being held at the Grand Connaught Rooms, Holborn, London, from 3-5 April. Over 400 social scientists will present their latest research, and 700 people will attend. The British Sociological Association’s mission is to represent the intellectual and sociological interests of its members. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235 www.britsoc.co.uk