

Post-Service Employment among ex-Service personnel and their partners:

A synthesis of existing research evidence

To help ensure that evidence is at the heart of decision making for the benefit of ex-Service personnel and their families, the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) Research Centre has committed to producing thematic research and policy summaries. These are intended to inform both policy and practice, as well as future research.

This synthesis summarises existing research evidence about United Kingdom (UK) ex-Service personnel and their partners' employment in the civilian labour market and identifies potential areas for further enquiry. It was produced using a robust methodology, including a narrative literature review of extant academic and grey literature. This summary was also subject to peer-review. Further information about the methodology is provided in the accompanying full report.

Key Findings



Recent Ministry of Defence and 2021 Census data indicate most ex-Service personnel secure employment after leaving the UK Armed Forces, with employment rates similar to those of non-veterans of comparable age, sex, and region.



Ex-Service personnel hold roles similar to non-veterans, such as in professional occupations, associate professional and technical roles, and managerial positions. They are more likely to be employed in public administration and defence, and the transport and storage industry.



Employment prospects for ex-Service personnel are influenced by personal characteristics like gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, country of birth, age, neurodivergence, and individual resources such as confidence and self-reliance, mirroring trends in the general population.



Common barriers to employment include lower educational attainment, lack of civilian work experience, adverse childhood experiences and antisocial behaviour, rank and branch-related factors, health conditions, skill transferability challenges, difficulties in adapting to civilian work culture, and geographical constraints.



Employment facilitators include adequate time for resettlement and the development of a civilian identity, engagement with education and training during or after Service, strong transferable skills, effective and tailored career transition programmes, successful adaptation to civilian work culture, and the establishment of supportive social networks.



While perceptions of ex-Service personnel's skills and work ethic have improved among employers, negative stereotypes and misconceptions continue to contribute to discriminatory hiring practices.



Post-Service careers are often characterised by complex and non-linear trajectories, with some challenges emerging years after discharge. Emerging evidence suggests many ex-Service personnel may face underemployment and underpayment, potentially leading to feelings of overqualification and dissatisfaction.



Partners of ex-Service personnel face employment challenges which have been largely overlooked, including frequent relocations while in Service, childcare responsibilities, and employers' misconceptions, contributing to career instability.

Recommendations



Further work is required to redefine 'successful' employment for ex-Service personnel, incorporating not just the effective use of their skills and qualifications, but also how well their roles align with personal values, work-life balance, and an overall sense of fulfilment.



The longitudinal career trajectories of ex-Service personnel need to be further explored to provide insights into evolving employment roles and factors influencing long-term career success.



Greater attention must be given to the impact of intersecting identities (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, disability, neurodivergence) on employment outcomes, to identify risk factors and support needs, and to develop targeted interventions addressing these unique challenges.



Further research is needed to explore the influence of in-Service factors—such as rank and branch, deployment history, length of Service, type of discharge, and time since discharge—on employment trajectories.



A stronger focus on employment facilitators is essential to develop support which effectively contributes to successful transitions. Factors such as the development of relevant experience and qualifications, enhancing skill transferability, facilitating partners' employment opportunities, and providing avenues for networking and increasing social capital should be further examined.



Expanding our understanding of the cultural and identity challenges faced by ex-Service personnel during their transition to civilian life and employment, and the role of personal resources (e.g. determination, confidence, self-reliance, resilience) in this process, is necessary to develop effective support and integration strategies.



Continuing to build evidence on ex-Service personnel's contributions in the civilian workplace—including their leadership, problem-solving, and organisational skills—and promoting inclusive hiring practices that mitigate conscious and unconscious biases are necessary to challenge existing stereotypes and misconceptions.



UK-based research on the long-term employment of ex-Service partners during and after the transition period is required. This research should consider diverse family structures and understudied groups, including male partners, partners from ethnic minorities, or those of non-UK origin.

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This infographic summarises research from *Post-Service Employment among ex-Service personnel and their partners: Research Summary*, available from <https://www.fimt-rc.org/research/employment>

FiMT Research Centre

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The Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) Research Centre aims to ensure that evidence about the experiences and needs of Serving personnel, ex-Service personnel, and their families is at the heart of decision making so that it can inform and transform policy and practice to enable successful transition to civilian life post-Service. The FiMT Research Centre is run by a consortium of RAND Europe and the King's Centre for Military Health Research at King's College London, under a grant agreement with the Forces in Mind Trust until 2027. For more information: <https://www.fimt-rc.org>.



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