# A comparison of the prevalence and severity of mental disorder between UK ex-serving military personnel and the general population.

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KCMHR is an academic department at King's College London conducting mixed methods research into military health.

- Deployment experiences
- Mental and physical health
- Treatment trajectories

- Alcohol misuse in the military
- Wellbeing of military families
- Veteran employment experiences

# Veteran Mental and Treatment Needs
## *Project Overview*

Our project will involve **three linked studies** into the mental health and treatment needs of UK veterans:

**Study 1: Mental health**

Compare the mental health of veterans with those in the general population who have never served in the military.

**Study 2: Treatment needs**

Examine nationally collected data from **NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services** and compare the needs and outcomes of the veterans with non-veterans.

**Study 3: Help seeking veterans**

Compare the characteristics of veterans who access NHS IAPT services with those who:

 i) Reported a mental health problem

ii) Reported seeking treatment

# Context

- The majority of those who serve in the military cope successfully and adapt to civilian life after they leave.

- But for some, military service can negatively impact their mental health.

- It is important to fully understand the mental health needs of UK veterans.

- Ensuring there are services to meet the mental health needs of veterans is a **UK government priority** and a social and legal obligation enshrined in the **Armed Forces Covenant.**

# Mental health of serving military personnel

Considerable research has been conducted on the mental health of **serving** UK military personnel.

**Fear et al. (2010)**

A large representative UK study of military personnel (n=9990) to assess the consequences of deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about their deployment experiences and mental health.

- 20% of reported symptoms of common mental health disorders.
- 13% reported alcohol misuse.
- 4% reported PTSD.

# Mental health of serving military personnel

## Goodwin et al. (2015)

- Compared CMD in serving personnel (n=7670) to working civilians (n=7841).

- The odds of probable CMD were found to be double in military personal compared to those selected from a general population study as employed in other occupations.

**By contrast, there is a lack of research into veteran mental health and how it compares to those who have never served in the military.**

# What do we know about veteran mental health?

- In the UK, there have been very few robust, representative comparisons of how the mental health of veterans compares to non-veterans.

- Previous findings suggest there is **little difference** between the two groups.

## Woodhead et al. (2011)

Compared 257 post-national service veterans with 504 non-veterans from APMS 2007.

The study found the mental health of veterans (PTSD, alcohol misuse and depression) was no poorer than non-veterans.

**BUT**

- Small sample.
- Mostly retired, male, and most aged 50+

Unlikely to be generalizable to other groups of veterans.

# What don't we know?

Whether such rates of prevalence occur in the veteran population remains uncertain:

- *Being removed from military services and its potential dangers and stresses may mean that the <span style="color:green">mental health of veterans is no different that civilians</span>.*

**OR**

- *The stresses of military service, or difficulty transitioning to civilian life may mean that <span style="color:red">mental health problems are more prevalent</span> in veterans.*

*Our study:* **How does the mental health of veterans compare to the general population when accounting for employment status and socio-demographic characteristics?**

1) Does the **prevalence of poor mental health** differ between veterans and non-veterans?

   - How is this difference influenced by employment status?

   - How does prevalence of specific symptoms compare?

2) Are **socio-demographic factors** *(SES, employment, marital status, education)* more strongly associated with **mental health** among veterans **compared** to non-veterans?

*Our analysis*

A secondary data analysis
of a representative sample of
UK veterans and non-veterans

# The veteran sample

Our veteran sample was taken from the KCMHR cohort: a large ongoing cohort study of UK military personnel assessing physical and mental consequences of military service and deployment.

**Phase 1:** June 2004 and March 2006
**Phase 2:** November 2007 and September 2009
**Phase 3:** October 2014 and December 2016

At each phase, respondents completed a self-report questionnaire covering **socio-demographics, service history, physical and mental health and alcohol use.**

# The veteran sample

**Eligibility criteria:**

1.  Must have served in the military as a regular – *i.e. full time.*

2.  Must have left the military entirely – *no longer serving as a regular or reservist in any military division.*

Of those who participated in phase 3 of the KCMHR cohort, **3,008** met our definition of a veteran.

**Measures:**

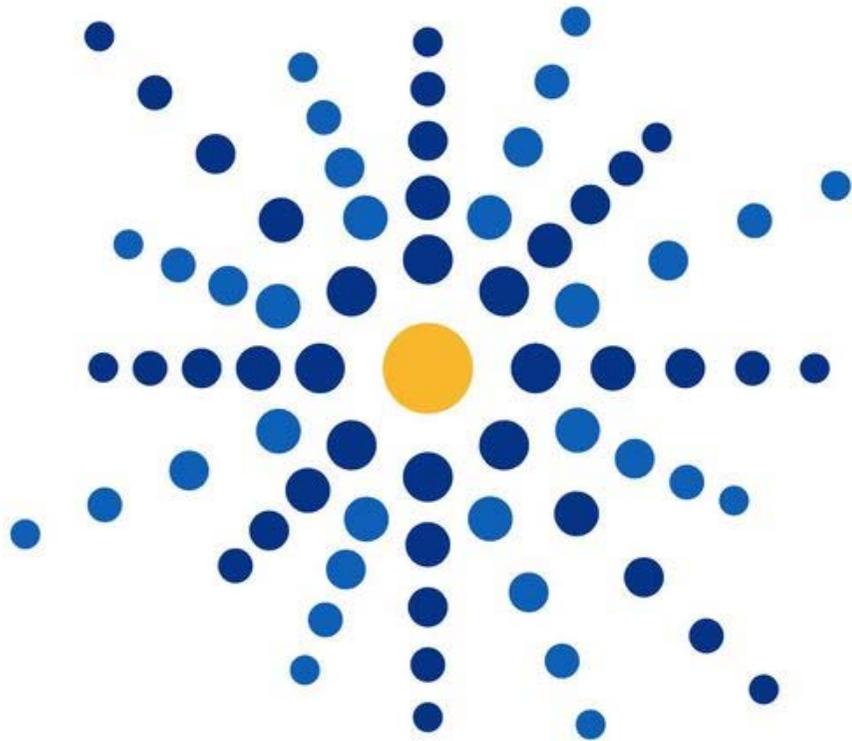| Disorder | Measurement |
| --- | --- |
| **Common mental disorders** | General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) |
| **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** | PTSD Checklist (PCL-C) |
| **Alcohol misuse** | Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) |

# Requirements of non-veteran data

- ❑ Gathered 2014-2016.
- ❑ Contains a military identifier.
- ❑ Measures PTSD using the PCL-C.
- ❑ Measures alcohol misuse using AUDIT.
- ❑ Measures CMD using the GHQ-12.

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2014 Adult Psychiatric
Morbidity Survey (APMS)

**NatCen**
**Social Research**

# Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey

**Exclusions:**

- APMS participants outside the age range of the veteran sample (n=1157).

- Reported ever serving in the armed forces (n=518) were excluded.

Final sample of **5,871**

# Requirements of Non-veteran data

✓ Gathered 2014-2016.

✓ Contains a military identifier.

✗ Measures PTSD using the PCL-C.

✗ Measures alcohol misuse using AUDIT.

✓ Measures CMD using the GHQ-12.

UK Household
Longitudinal Study
(UKHLS)

Understanding
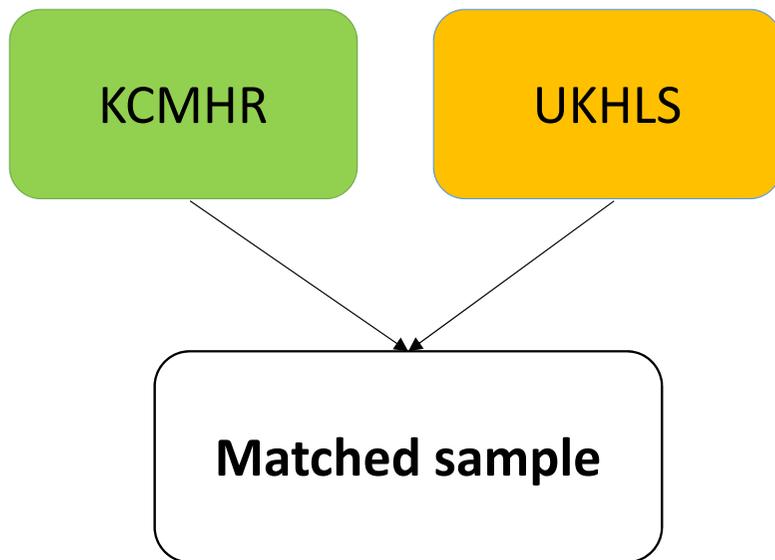Society

# Understanding Society

**Exclusions:**

- Outside the age range of our veteran sample were removed from the sample (n= 8,065)

- Reported currently or previously serving in the armed forces in wave 6 or any previous wave (n=75).
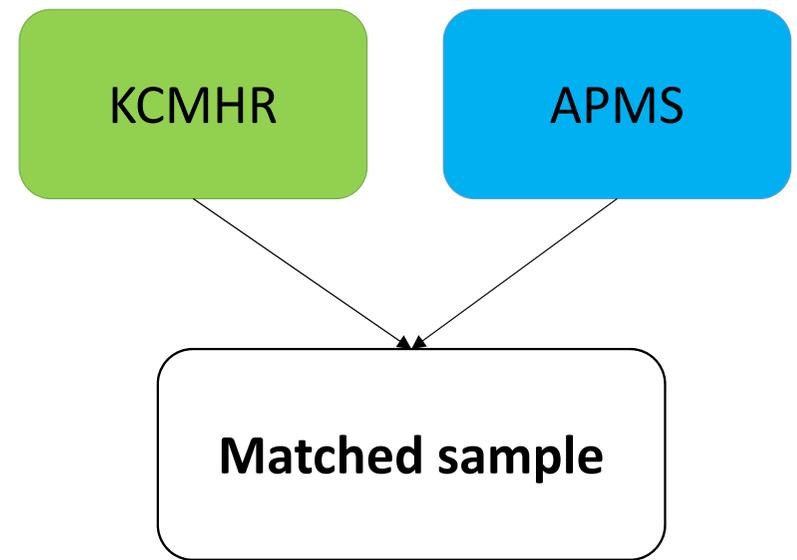
The remaining sample of **22,760**

# Matching the veteran and general population samples

Veteran and non-veteran samples were matched on age and gender to KCMHR data using entropy balancing (a multivariate reweighting method) to improve comparability.
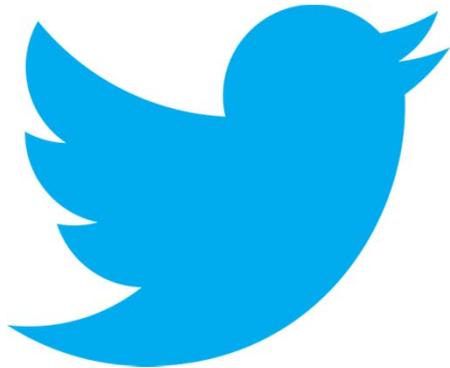
**Common mental health disorders**

**Alcohol Misuse and PTSD**

KCMHR

UKHLS

**Matched sample**

KCMHR

APMS

**Matched sample**

Results…

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⊙ London

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# Thank you



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