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TA soldiers at greater risk of mental health problems and alcohol abuse on their return to the UK

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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British Army reserves returning from Afghanistan are more likely to suffer mental health problems than full-time troops because they struggle more to readjust to civilian life.

Many Territorial Army soldiers found the transition from military life to be 'challenging' - putting them at greater risk of developing serious psychological problems linked to the battlefield.

Reservists were more likely to feel people at home did not understand what they had been through overseas, less likely to feel supported by the military and have more difficulty resuming normal social activities, according to the latest research.



Transition: Territorial Army soldiers returning from Afghanistan are more likely to suffer mental health problems than full-time troops because of the struggle to readjust to civilian life

Those left feeling unsupported after leaving their regiments were most vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression or alcohol abuse.

The study of 5,000 UK troops who had fought in Afghanistan and Iraq was carried out by academics from King's College London.

The research comes as Defence Secretary Liam Fox introduces controversial proposals to cull the size of the regular Army from 102,000 to 84,000 – the smallest since the Boer War – whilst maintaining a part-time fighting force of about 36,000.



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Challenging: Reservists are more likely to feel people at home did not understand what they had been through, less likely to feel supported by the military and have more difficulty resuming normal social activities



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Steep figures: Ministry of Defence figures have revealed that 10 British troops a day are seeking treatment for mental health problems suffered in the line of duty



© David Jones/PA Wire

Controversial: Secretary of State Liam Fox has proposed to cull the size of the regular Army and 'build-up' the number of reserve soldiers

The study, reported in the *Annals of Epidemiology* journal, found: 'Many reservists find the transition between their military and civilian lives difficult and that alternating between these two social settings and corresponding social identities often results in them feeling unsupported, misunderstood, and poorly integrated with both sets of social networks.'

Dr Samuel Harvey, the lead researcher, said the reason for reservists' higher mental health risks were difficult to glean. He said: 'We don't think it is because reservists are having a more dangerous time in Iraq or Afghanistan.'

'And while in the past, some reservists have reported feeling unaccepted and underutilised within the military, this seems to have been less of a problem recently.'

'The main message from this study is that those who wish to help reservists cope with the psychological impact of deployment need to not only focus on what happens during a tour of duty, but to consider what occurs after they return home.'

Military charities have repeatedly warned that the UK is facing a 'ticking timebomb' of ex-servicemen who are suffering potentially life-changing mental disorders following intense conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ministry of Defence figures have revealed that 10 British troops a day are seeking treatment for mental health problems suffered in the line of duty.

And the problem is expected to get worse as more British soldiers fighting the Taliban in Helmand endure the daily threat of roadside bombs and many have seen friends and comrades killed and badly injured.

Troops who do not get help for mental illnesses often face problems including homelessness, social exclusion, mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse and fall into crime.

It typically takes 14 years for veterans to seek help once they have left the Armed Forces.

Stephen Clark, a spokesman for military charity Combat Stress, said: 'Men and women who serve in the reserve forces live different lives to their regular colleagues – they spend less time among their peers in the Forces and have to switch between the military and civilian community quickly and regularly.'

The Ministry of Defence said it was putting in place a number of initiatives to tackle the problem including doubling the number of therapists trained to treat veterans, setting up a 24-hour support line and teaching GPs to better understand the needs of the military.



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It typically takes 14 years for veterans to seek help once they have left the Armed Forces

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Pull out of all illegal, non UK invasive 'wars'.

- mason, Dover, 19/8/2011 12:30

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It took me, I reckon 2 years to fully recover from a tour of Iraq, before my life was back where it was before I deployed. We had what would classified now as a trip to Disney land in comparison to colleagues who've returned from Afghanistan..... We were mortared the night before we left, got on a plane and were causing mayhem in Nottingham 24hrs later not sensible!! I hope more support is avail now then was then. Do not know if there is a full on solution to the problem though

- Anon TA Soldier, London, 19/8/2011 12:19

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My son who is TA and recently returned from a tour of duty was told he was no longer required at his place of work, so not much appreciation there!

- Brit, uk, 19/8/2011 12:05

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My husband was a corporal In the TA and did many tours alongside the regular army , most people don't realise they do the same work as regular soldiers all while trying to keep their civilian job as well and I know my husband felt very undervalued in his role , he left the army when our third child was born as financially we couldn't manage as when he was away on tours he was paid a pittance , I greatly admire all the forces but the TA rarely gets mentioned for the valuable role they do .

- sawyersgirl, Cheshire UK, 19/8/2011 10:52

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