Highlight Notice for the Forces in Mind Trust’s Mental Health Research Programme

**HN 002 Ex-Service personnel, employment and mental health**

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) in collaboration with Centre for Mental Health and King’s Centre for Military Health Research, a part of King’s College London, is issuing a highlight notice under FiMT’s Mental Health Research Programme (MHRP) as part of an initiative to encourage high quality research in the field of veterans’ mental health. The aim of this highlight notice is to encourage applications that propose innovative ways to identify, evaluate and/or propose new methods of improving employment/under-employment in former UK Armed Forces personnel with mental ill-health.

Employment is vital to health and should be recognised as a health outcome. The employment rates for adults with mental health problems contrasts with the general population: with 43% of all people with mental health problems in employment, compared to 74% of the general population and 65% of people with other health conditions (Department of Health, 2016). The employment rate of people with severe and enduring mental health problems is just 7.3% (HSCIC, 2013). Whilst the majority of ex-Service personnel do well after transitioning from military to civilian life, for some, the return to civilian life can be difficult (Centre for Mental Health, 2016; Pinder et. al, 2011). Findings from the literature support this assessment, with UK veteran unemployment rates varying from 6% to 19.5%, depending on the cohort of personnel reviewed (Pinder et. al, 2011; HM Government, 2007; Iversen et. al., 2005; Hotopf et al., 2003). When the relationship between unemployment and mental ill-health is considered in the general population, there appears to be a causal link both ways (Centre for Mental Health, 2013). People with mental health problems are much less likely to be in paid employment (Rinaldi et al., 2011) and people who have been unemployed for at least six months are more likely to develop depression or other mental health conditions (Diette et al., 2012).

Ex-Service personnel suffering from mental ill-health are likely to be the most susceptible ex-Service group to a range of hardships, including unemployment (Iversen et al. 2005). A review of 166 Armed Forces personnel presenting to a single general hospital following an incident of self-harm identified employment problems as a trigger in 43.9% of cases (Hawton et al., 2009). A FiMT-commissioned review of serving and ex-Service personnel’s mental health complements these findings, identifying those who leave military service due to mental ill-health as being at an increased risk of social exclusion (e.g. unemployment and homelessness) and continuing poor health (Samele et al., 2013). A recent Centre for Mental Health report reviewing the evidence on how to support Armed Forces veterans with mental health conditions into paid employment, and evaluating The Poppy Factory’s employability service, identified a range of factors that affect how ex-Service personnel suffering mental ill-health find and retain employment (Centre for Mental Health, 2016).

Building on the FiMT-commissioned review from 2013, and Centre for Mental Health and Royal British Legion reviews from 2016, the MHRP would like to encourage applications that propose innovative ways to address one or more of the following:

- The prevalence of diagnosed mental health problems in UK serving personnel and how they might best be prepared for and supported into post-Service employment
- Identification and evaluation of existing methods of support that help ex-Service personnel suffering a range of mental health problems (from common mental health disorders to PTSD) to find and retain appropriate employment
- Methods and techniques to enhance the resilience of Service leavers with mental ill-health to help them secure and sustain appropriate employment post-Service
- Potential change mechanisms to help improve UK ex-Service personnel’s awareness of and engagement in pathways to employment for those suffering mental ill-health
- The need for and feasibility of specialised support for veterans with mental ill-health specifically related to seeking and retaining employment
- Determine whether veterans would benefit from more integrated support models which combine mental health services with mainstream employment support
• Identify the support needs and employment outcomes of Early Service Leavers, Reservists, female and/or other minority ex-Service personnel groups suffering mental ill-health
• Identify the extent to which veterans and their families with mental ill-health are underemployed and whether or not such underemployment aids or exacerbates their mental ill-health (e.g. through under use of and potential subsequent loss of skills, knowledge and confidence)
• Identify long-term analysis of unemployment rates for ex-Service personnel with mental ill-health, specifically beyond 6 months of leaving service
• Methods of evaluating the long-term effects of the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) on ex-Service personnel with mental ill-health, specifically relating to the ability of this group to remain in employment after the end of the two-year CTP Programme (HM Government, 2015)
• Individual Placement Support (IPS) has increasing become recognised as one of the most effective approaches to employment support (Department of Health, 2016). A literature review aimed at identifying effective interventions for maximising work outcomes for the veteran population with mental illness identified 32 relevant studies, 10 of which focused on veterans. Authors agreed with numerous other systematic reviews that IPS is the most effective intervention to support people with serious mental health conditions to return to competitive employment (Van Til et al., 2013). The MHRP would be interested in evaluating the suitability of IPS for UK veterans, identifying whether the outcomes for veterans differ from those of the general population, and whether a tailored veteran specific IPS method would be more effective.

The Mental Health Research Programme welcomes research proposals that address any one or more of the above aspects concerning the employment of ex-Service personnel experiencing mental ill-health.

Applications
The application process to apply for funding to FiMT under a highlight notice follows a two-stage process. The first stage is a short initial application form. If successful at this stage, a full application is invited. Full details of the application process, the initial application form and assessment criteria guidance are available from FiMT’s website: http://www.fim-trust.org/mental-health/funding/how-to-apply.

Applications received by FiMT that fall under this Highlight Notice will be prioritised for evaluation until the end of October 2017. Please ensure you include the number and title of the highlight notice in the relevant box of the application form (HN 002 Ex-Service personnel, employment and mental health) and ensure you justify in your application how your research fits within the priority area.

Contact
If you wish to discuss this notice and/or your MHRP proposal, please contact Harry Palmer, the MHRP Programme Coordinator on 07469151152 or email harry.palmer@centreformentalhealth.org.uk.

References
Department of Health (2016). The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health, Redditch: Independent Mental Health Taskforce to the NHS in England


Worked up by:
MHRP PC and RSM
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