



Armed Forces community voices and views: YouGov research overview

We commissioned YouGov to undertake a survey of 3000+ members of the Armed Forces community (AFC) across the UK, conducted in October 2024. This was one of the largest studies of its kind, representative of groups in the AFC wherever possible to capture their views of issues they, or their families face, and issues affecting the AFC as a whole. The survey was followed by qualitative research to explore responses and themes in more detail, through online interviews and focus groups.

Understanding the needs of the AFC is vital to inform RBL’s organisational Strategy as it underpins our ability to design effective services, influence policy, and advocate for meaningful change. We believe these findings will be of use and interest across the Armed Forces sector.

Background



3000+
people in the AFC
were surveyed across
the UK



**2 x 90-minute
text-based focus groups**
with veterans aged
18-44 and bereaved family
members (mixed age)

**11 x 60-minute
in-depth interviews**
with currently Serving
personnel



Breakdown of respondent groups:

242	Currently Serving personnel (regular or reservist)
584	Immediate family members of those currently Serving
1386	Veterans (regular, reservist or National Service)
1538	Immediate family members of veterans
571	Bereaved family members of someone who served in the UK Armed Forces.



**4 x 90-minute video
focus groups**
with veterans aged 45-64,
veterans aged 65+, family
members of currently Serving
(mixed age), family members
of living veterans (mixed age)

There is cross over between each group, with some respondents belonging to more than one option. Family members could include spouse/partner, (adult) children, parents, or siblings.

Personal: Issues facing 'you and/or your immediate family'

Almost **1 in 2 (45%)** of people in the AFC reported that they, or their families were facing some sort of issue

1 in 6 (17%) say they, or their families face physical health issues

1 in 8 (13%) say they, or their families face mental health issues

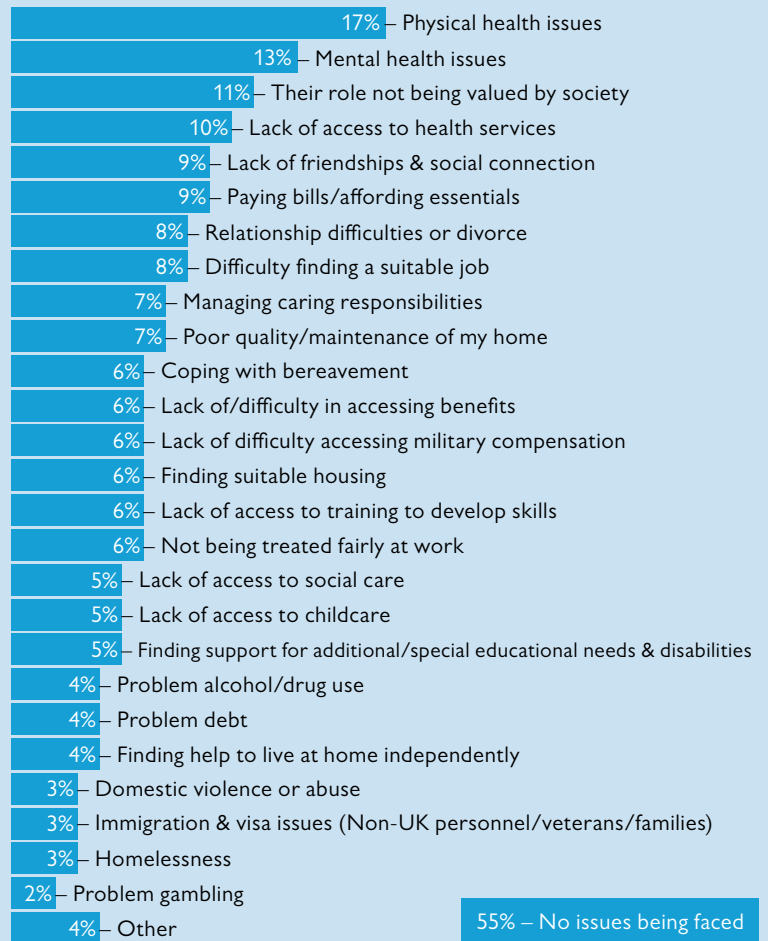
A small but significant minority reported they, or their families had experience of:

Lack of friendships and social connection
1 in 11 (9%)

Paying bills and affording essentials
1 in 11 (9%)

Relationship difficulties or divorce
1 in 12 (8%)

Difficulty finding a suitable job
1 in 12 (8%)



55% – No issues being faced

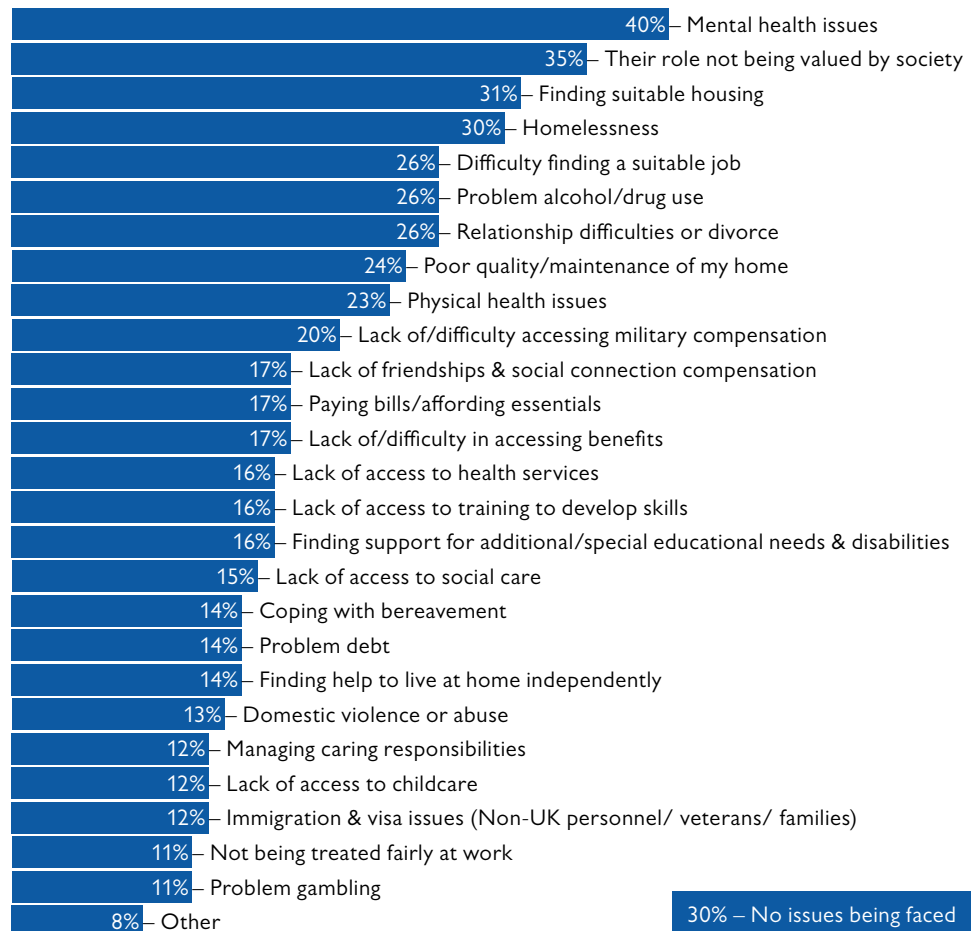
Perceived: Issues facing 'the Armed Forces community as a whole'

When asked about issues they felt others in the AFC faced, people were more likely to report issues they, or their families hadn't personally faced.

7 in 10 (70%) say there are issues the AFC is facing, with **4 in 10 (40%)** saying there are mental health issues in the community

Some issues high on this list, such as **homelessness** and finding suitable housing, were much lower on the list of issues faced personally

3 in 10 (30%) say no issues are being faced



30% – No issues being faced

Across all issues, a higher proportion of respondents said they believed the AFC as a whole was experiencing a given issue than said they were experiencing it personally. While this is understandable – since one question asks about the entire AFC population and the other asks about individual experience – we think this highlights an important gap between perceived and personally experienced need that should be noted in policy and service design.

Mental health

While mental health is an issue a relatively high proportion of people report experiencing themselves or within their families (13%), the proportion who believe this is an issue for the whole AFC is much higher at 40%



Some older veterans felt that mental health issues existed at the time they served, but weren't given the prominence or recognition they are today

"The mental health side is something that there needs a bit more of a focus on, and not just because you mostly think of PTSD from war fighting. ... It's often normal life events, and how it's handled."
(Currently Serving)



Physical health

"One of my concerns with the families are that you move around. You go to many areas and the so-called promises of moving from waiting list to waiting list, and moving at the same point.

So, say you were 10th on the list for IVF, you go to a new area and you're back at the bottom... you should move across at parity. That doesn't happen."

(Veterans aged 45-64)

1 in 6 (17%) reported experiencing physical health issues, this is the highest reported of all issues facing people or their families

Almost **1 in 4** (23%) of respondents said they believed physical health was an issue the wider AFC faced, 9th highest on the list of issues reported

Role not being valued / feeling undervalued by society



A consistent theme across groups is the perception their role is not valued by society or valued by wider society. **35%** – around **1 in 3 people** – said this was an issue for the AFC, and **11%** – roughly **1 in 9** – reported it as an issue for themselves or their family

Differences between reported personal experience and perceptions of issues facing whole AFC

3 in 10 (30%) perceive homelessness as an issue facing the AFC, though only

3 in 100 (3%) report it as an issue for them or their family



1 in 4 (26%) perceive alcohol/drug use as an issue facing the AFC as a whole, though only

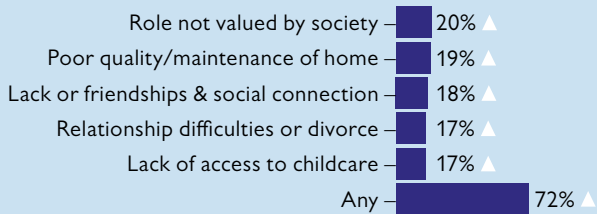
1 in 25 (4%) report it as an issue for them or their family

Challenges facing specific groups

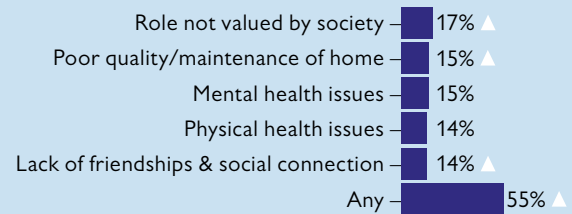
Key issues faced by AFC members and their families

Among **currently Serving personnel and their family members**, their role not being valued by society and poor quality/maintenance of their home were the top concerns

Currently Serving

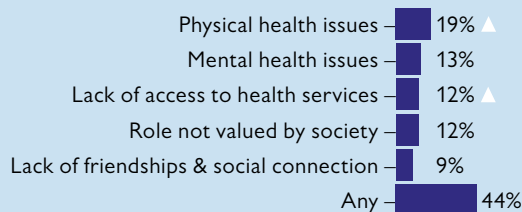


Family member of currently Serving

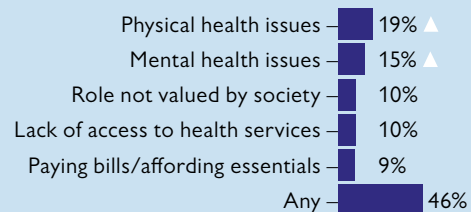


For **veterans, family members of veterans, and bereaved family members**, physical and mental health were the top concerns – alongside a lack of access to health services and a sense that their role is not valued by society

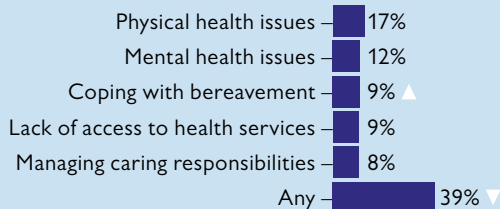
Veteran



Family member of veteran



Bereaved family member



'Any' shows the proportion of respondents in each group who selected at least one issue.

Q1q. Which, if any, of the following are the biggest issues currently facing... You and/or your immediate family (e.g. spouse/partner, child, parent, sibling) (Please tick all that apply in each column).

Base: Currently Serving (n=242), Veteran (n=1386), Family member currently Serving (n=584), Family member veteran (n=1538), Bereaved family member (n=571).

▲▼ Statistically significant difference.

Issues that respondents felt were most important to be addressed



Veterans: Transition period to civilian life.

Respondents felt that transition to civilian life and a different form of family life could still present difficulties, and be a particularly stressful period.

Early intervention and proactive support felt critical, and there was concern that once one thing goes wrong, such as not finding a job, it can then snowball into not being able to pay bills or afford a home.

Serving families:

Viewed as a group 'slipping through the net'. Respondents talked about poorly maintained housing, instability and difficulties accessing services because of frequent moves, and feeling isolated from families and support networks.

"I have a child with special educational needs, so to support families who maybe need a little bit more support when they're constantly moving is a very practical thing."
(Currently Serving family member)

Bereaved families:

Financial strain and lack of emotional and practical support.

When going through the stress of a bereavement it can be especially hard to have the time and emotional bandwidth to search for help, so easy signposting and easy access to support are critical.

"I got a one-off charity donation when my husband died – that's all... I could have done with lots of help of many kinds, but I didn't know I could get it."
(Bereaved family member)

Currently Serving:

High workloads, childcare costs and wider financial challenges, and mental health pressures were mentioned as key concerns.

"I'd say the cost-of-living crisis [is the biggest issue]. Privates, they don't earn a lot of money, and some of them get subsidised accommodation but if they've got two or three children they're going to be struggling."
(Currently Serving)

Support gaps

Some of the challenges are supported by RBL and other organisations, however, the respondents were either not aware of the support available, or were unable to access or benefit from the support at the time they needed it. One area which showed a gap was support for the mental health of family members.

It is vital that services and support are available to meet needs across the AFC, and that people know about help that is available, and how to access it.

1 in 8 (13%) reported support needs unmet by any organisation – rising to **1 in 4** (24%) among those currently Serving

Key unmet needs



“Employment options are very limited for spouses.”



“After the death of my husband, my children and I were without a place to live, which was very difficult to cope with at the time.”



“My husband’s issues with gambling, his mental health, PTSD and difficulties getting a job when he left the forces – all these things I had to help him overcome with no other help.”



“Isolation with spouse serving overseas esp in war zones and I was left far from family support with two young children.”

Advocacy and role of government

Respondents felt there was a vital role of government providing core support for the AFC, including healthcare and support for housing and financial security. Charities were seen as central to additional support where wider provision falls short, and to advocating for the needs and interests of the AFC. They were also seen as important in challenging negative stereotypes and raising awareness of the AFC’s contributions and the ongoing need to recognise and remember their service.

If you are interested in exploring this research in more depth, please get in contact: PolicyandResearch@britishlegion.org.uk