



Barriers and facilitators to successful transition to civilian life for ex-servicewomen.

The perspective of service providers and policymakers

Part of the SUSTAIN Project

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What did we aim to do?

Examine the barriers and facilitators ex-servicewomen experience making a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life in the UK.



How does this fit into SUSTAIN?

Review of existing research, support services and interventions

Interviews with ex-servicewomen

Discussions with policymakers and service providers

Comparative data analysis of ex-servicewomen, ex-servicemen and civilian women

Triangulation of the findings and recommendations



Who did we speak to?

- 28 individuals
- 22 organisations
- Half had served in UK Armed Forces

What did they tell us?

The conflicting identities of servicewomen

Role as a woman

Invisible veterans

Conflicting role in the community

Sexism: Women do not belong in service

Perception of weakness

In-service inequality

Adoption of masculine traits

Male-orientated veteran services

The needs of servicewomen

Women's health needs

Navigating a family-unfriendly culture

Military sexual trauma

Self-confidence

Successful transition is individualised and all-encompassing

Holistic approach needed

Early preparation needed

Personal situation matters

Transition is a non-linear journey to content reintegration

The conflicting identities of servicewomen

Role as a woman

Invisible veterans

Conflicting role in the community

"Women are reluctant to identify as veterans and don't want to engage in veterans' charities because they don't perceive themselves as veterans."



Sexism: Women don't belong in service

Perception of weakness

In-service inequality

Adoption of masculine traits

Male-orientated veteran services

"They'd expect me to be rubbish, they'd expect me to be no good at [physical training] they'd expect me to be terrible at my job, probably think that I was going to sleep with some of the soldiers and that was just the expectation they had so for me to go and for me to even get myself to a level with the guys I had to work ten times hard so it breeds this imposter syndrome because you're being told all the time you're not good enough....and that can flow into when you do leave."

The needs of servicewomen

Women's health needs

Navigating a family-unfriendly culture

Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Self-confidence

"It's the body armour, you know, carrying weight and things like that. It impacts women differently. I mean, don't get me wrong, my knees are just as shot as any other veteran. But, you know, if you have to carry weight, it impacts on our hips."



Successful transition is individualised and all-encompassing

Holistic approach needed

Early preparation needed

Personal situation matters

**Transition is a non-linear
journey to content
reintegration**

**"Transition starts at different stages for
different people depending on their
reasons for leaving and can last for as long
as it takes for an individual to genuinely
say 'I'm content in myself'."**





Strengths and limitations

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- Stakeholders provide valuable insight into ex-servicewomen's experiences due to their work with a diverse range of women (across ranks, branches, and circumstances).
 - Many stakeholder accounts were anecdotal, making it difficult to determine the era or relevance to current military policies.
 - There may be bias in the experiences shared, as many stakeholders work in support services and thus engage with women who had particularly difficult transitions or in-service experiences (e.g., harassment, housing or employment needs).
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Implications for policy and practice



- **Need for cultural change and inclusive policies:** deeper cultural shifts are needed to address subtle behaviours like inappropriate humour and indirect discrimination, which continue to marginalise women.
- **Gender-appropriate healthcare and support after service:** More awareness of women's issues amongst service providers and more inclusive spaces.
- **Future research** should evaluate the impact of recent policy changes on in-service experience and subsequent transition outcomes.

Thank you to...



Scan Me!

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