

Armed Service Veterans

Wirral Public Health
Intelligence Team

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An update to the 'Armed Service Veterans: Estimates for Wirral 2017' first published November 2017



Armed Service Veterans

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Background to JSNA – Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

What is a JSNA?

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) brings together data, evidence and insight to understand current and future needs of Wirral residents. It is intended to be a systematic review of the health and wellbeing needs of the local population, informing local priorities, policies and strategies that in turn informs local commissioning priorities that will improve health and wellbeing outcomes and reduce inequalities throughout the Borough.

Who is involved?

Information from Council, NHS and other partners is collected and collated to inform the JSNA and this reflects the important role that all organisations and sectors have (statutory, voluntary, community and faith) in improving the health and wellbeing of Wirral's residents.

About this document

This document provides an updated summary of key insights from the original [Cheshire and Merseyside JSNA section produced in 2013](#). It is a light-touch update, focusing only on areas where new information, data, or developments have emerged since the earlier version ([produced in 2017](#)). Not all content from the original JSNA has been revised, and some sections remain unchanged. For a complete and detailed understanding, users should refer to the full JSNA chapter alongside this update.

How can you help?

If you have ideas or any suggestions about these issues or topics then please email us at phintelligence@wirral.gov.uk

Armed Service Veterans

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Veteran Population Profile

- There were 13,303 people who had previously served in the UK armed forces in Wirral in 2021, 5.1% of the population aged 16 years and over. This is just over 1 in 20 people aged 16 years and over in Wirral. This was higher than any local authority within Cheshire and Merseyside, as well as the North West (3.8%) and England (3.8%).
- The Ward with the highest estimated proportion of armed forces veterans was Pensby and Thingwall (6.2%, n=671). In terms of absolute numbers, however, Leasowe and Moreton East had the highest number (n=699).
- The distribution of veterans was consistent with the overall resident population across deprivation quintiles and deciles in Wirral. In terms of absolute numbers, however, Quintile 1 had the highest number (n=3,956). This is 29.8% of all the armed forces veterans in Wirral. Quintile 3 had the fewest number of veterans (n=1,462). This was 11.0% of the total number of armed forces veterans.
- According to the 2021 Census the majority of armed forces veterans in Wirral were male (87.3%).
- In total, two-thirds of all armed forces veterans within Wirral (66.6%, n=8,859) were male and aged 50 and over.

Health and Disability

- Armed forces veterans were more likely than non-veterans to report poorer health in Wirral. In total, 13.0% of veterans reported being in very bad or bad health, compared to 8.5% of the non-veteran population.
- When accounting for age and sex, male veterans aged 65+ were more likely to be in very bad (5.1% compared to 3.4%) or bad health (14.1% compared to 10.2%) compared to non-veteran males aged 65+.
- Armed forces veterans were more likely than non-veterans to report disability in Wirral. In total, 34.4% of veterans reported being disabled a little or a lot, compared to 25.2% of the non-veteran population (aged 16+).
- When accounting for age and sex, male veterans aged 65+ were more likely to be disabled a lot (25.9% compared to 18.8%) or a little (20.7% compared to 18.1%) compared to non-veteran males aged 65+.

Social Circumstances

- Armed forces veterans were more likely to live alone compared to non-veterans when accounting for age and sex. In total, 1 in 4 veterans live alone (26.5%). This compares to almost 1 in 5 (18.8%) non-veterans in Wirral.
- Almost 1 in 3 (32.7%) veteran males aged 65 and over were living alone. This compares to 1 in 4 (25.3%) non-veteran males aged 65 and over.
- There was no notable difference between the proportion of the armed forces veterans and non-veterans when it comes to caring responsibilities within Wirral. There were 13.0% of armed forces veterans who provide any form of unpaid care identified in the 2021 Census. This compares to 12.6% of the non-veteran population.

Economic Activity

- Armed forces veterans were more likely to be economically inactive compared to non-veterans. Given the older age profile of veterans in Wirral, almost half were retired (47.6%).

Introduction

Wirral's latest report showcasing estimates on the armed service veterans population was [produced in 2017](#). This report provides an update to those estimates following the release of detailed 2021 Census data on armed service veterans.

The 2021 Census in England and Wales was the first to ask people if they had previously served in the UK armed forces. People aged 16 years and over were asked whether they had previously served in the regular or reserve UK armed forces, or both. People currently serving in the UK armed forces and those who had never served were both advised to tick "no".

People who have previously served in the regular or reserve UK armed forces are often known as the veteran population and form part of the armed forces community (along with those who currently serve in the armed forces or Merchant Navy and their families). The question on UK armed forces veterans was added to better meet the needs for service providers and others who support veterans, in line with the [Armed Forces Covenant](#).

More information about why this question was added can be found in the Office for National Statistics's white paper, [Help Shape Our Future: The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales](#), and about their plans for data on the armed forces community more generally on the [armed forces community question development webpage](#).

Important Caveat

Throughout this report, best efforts have been made to ensure fair comparisons between armed forces veterans and non-veterans. As the veteran population was predominantly male and older than the non-veteran population, direct comparisons could be misleading, particularly for outcomes such as health that are strongly associated with age and sex. To account for these differences, analyses was adjusted and, where appropriate, age- and sex-standardised, enabling observed differences to be interpreted more accurately and reducing the impact of demographic confounding.

Definitions

In this report, the updated estimates use data provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) using 2021 Census estimates.

The [ONS](#) define armed forces veterans as those who have previously served in the UK armed forces. This includes people that have served at least one day in the regular or reserve forces, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.

There are 5 main categories for the armed forces classification.

1. Previously served in UK regular armed forces
2. Previously served in UK reserve armed forces
3. Previously served in both regular and UK armed forces

4. Has not previously served in any UK armed forces
5. Does not apply: students and schoolchildren living away during term-time, and children aged 15 years and under.

In this report, armed forces veterans are defined as individuals in categories 1–3 above. Those classified as “does not apply” have been excluded from the analysis, as they are not part of the eligible population. Therefore, when referring to the total population or to those who have not served, this group is not included.

Insights

Geographical Analysis

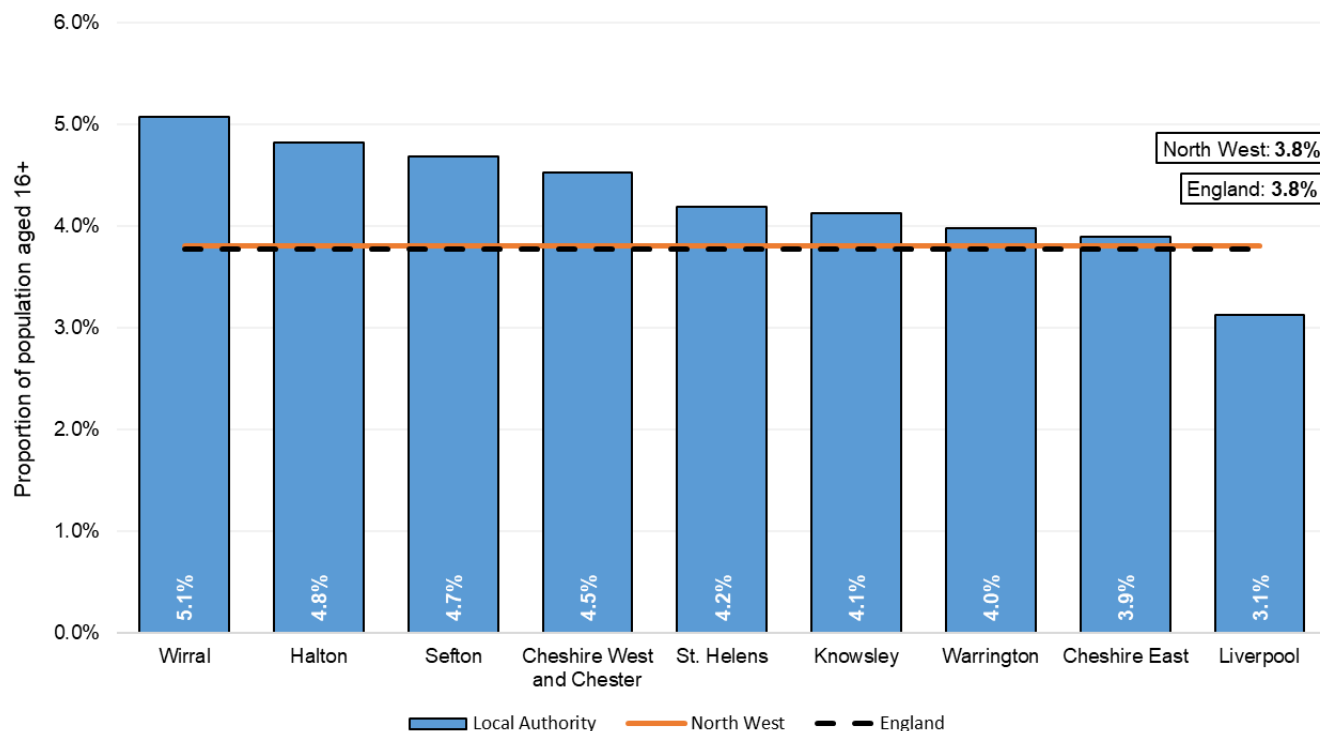
Over three-quarters of UK armed forces veterans residing in Wirral had previously served in the regular armed forces only (n=9,415, 70.8%), while 3,283 (24.7%) had served in the reserve armed forces only. The remaining 605 (4.5%) had served in both the regular and the reserve armed forces.

Local Authority

Figure 1 shows that an estimated 5.1% of the Wirral population (n=13,303), aged 16+, were an armed forces veteran. This is higher than any local authority within Cheshire and Merseyside, as well as the North West (3.8%) and England (3.8%).

In terms of absolute numbers, however, Cheshire West and Chester had the highest (n=13,357). This was just slightly higher than Wirral (n=13,303) and Cheshire East (12,825). Halton (n=5,007) had the fewest, followed by Knowsley (n=5,130) and St. Helens (n=6,300).

Figure 1: The proportion of the population, aged 16+, who identified as an Armed Forces Veteran, by Cheshire and Merseyside Local Authorities, North West and England, 2021



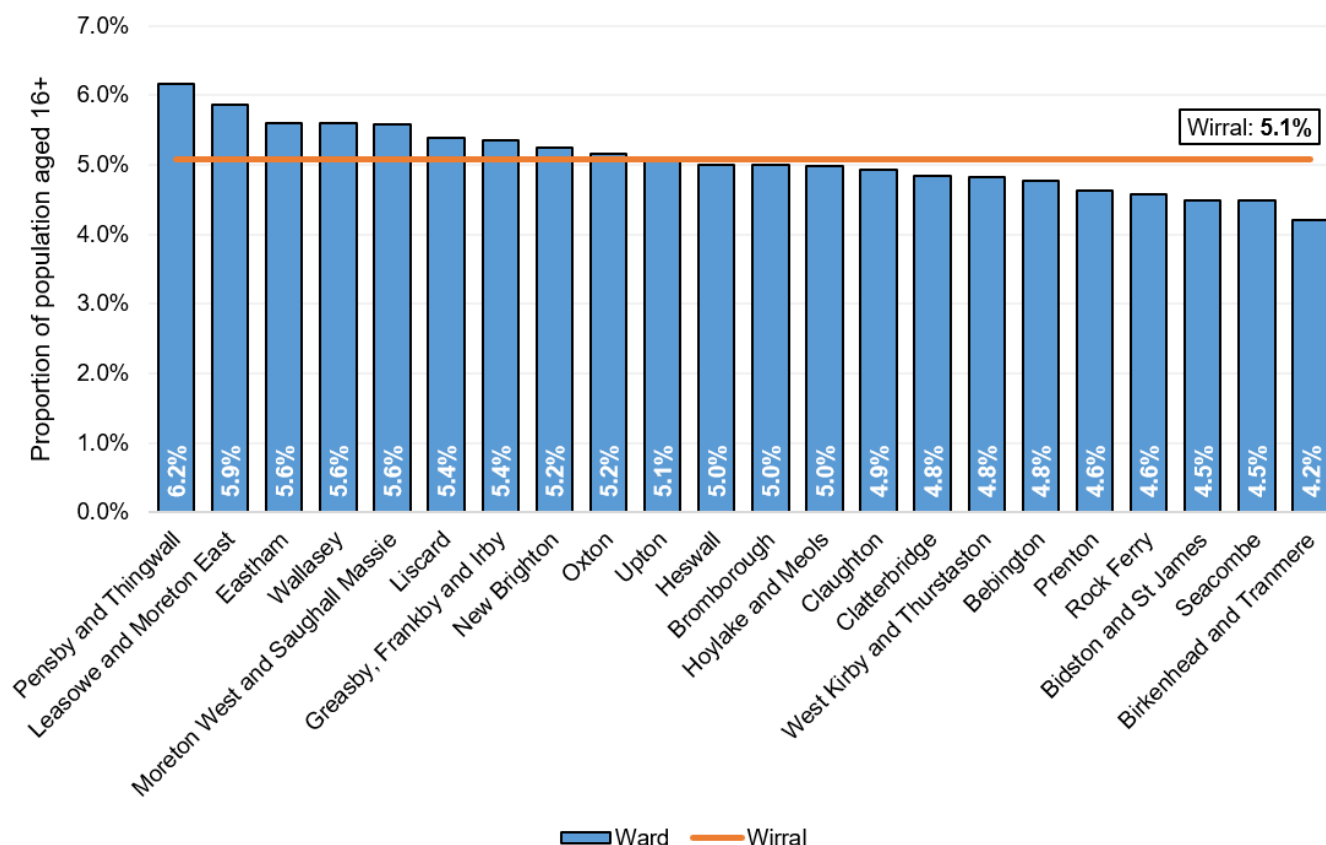
Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

Wards

Figure 2 shows that the Ward with the highest estimated proportion of armed forces veterans was Pensby and Thingwall (6.2%, n=671), whilst Birkenhead and Tranmere had the lowest (4.2%, n=537).

In terms of absolute numbers, however, Leasowe & Moreton East had the highest number (n=699). This was followed by both Wallasey and Liscard (n=680). West Kirby & Thurstaston (n=506) had the fewest, followed by Seacombe (n=511) and Birkenhead & Tranmere (n=537).

Figure 2: The proportion of the population, aged 16+, who identified as an Armed Forces Veteran, by Wirral Ward and Wirral Local Authority, 2021



Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

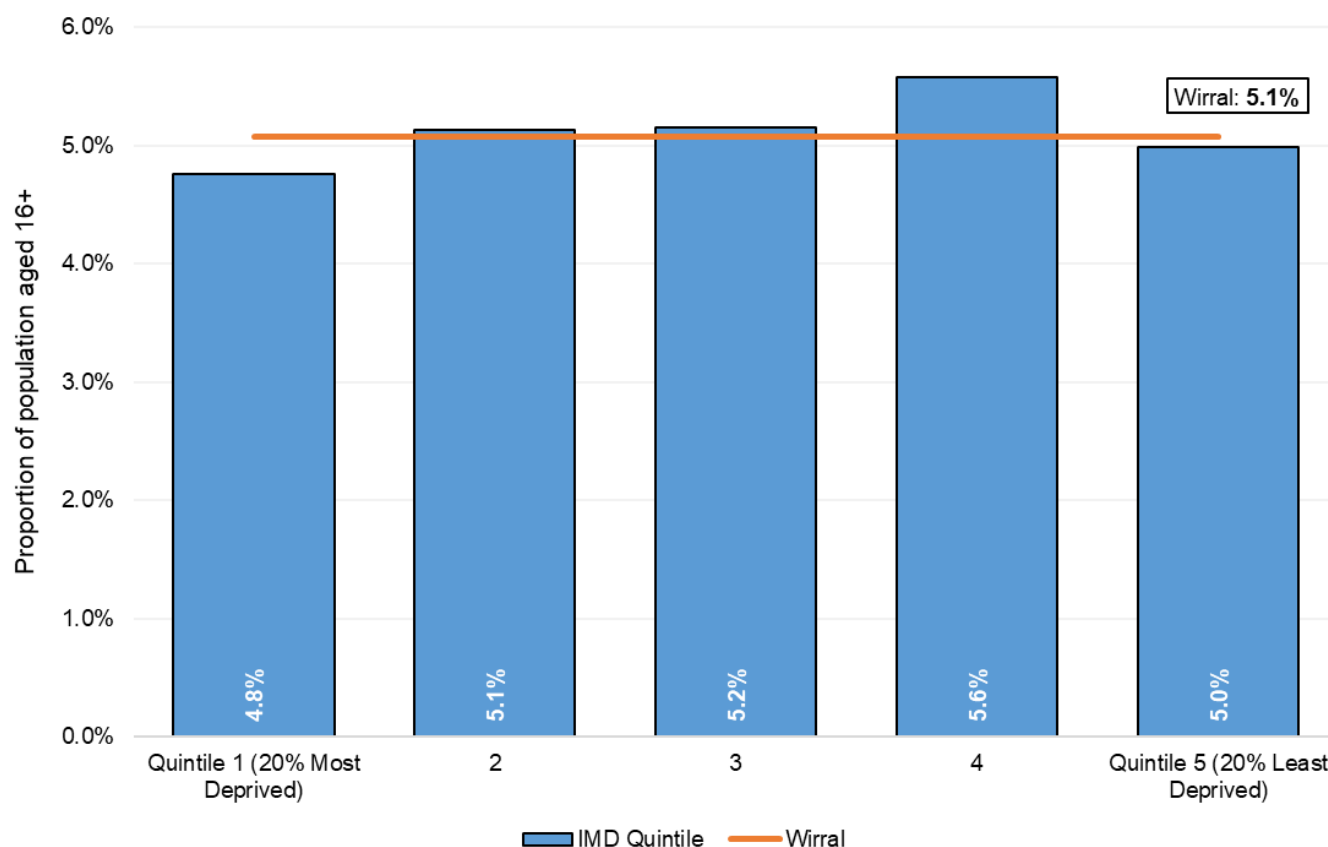
Indices of Deprivation

¹Quintiles

The distribution of veterans was consistent across deprivation quintiles and deciles in Wirral. **Figure 3** shows that the Quintile with the highest estimated proportion of armed forces veterans was Quintile 4 (5.6%), whilst Quintile 1 had the lowest (4.8%).

In terms of absolute numbers, however, Quintile 1 had the highest number (n=3,956). This is 29.8% of all the armed forces veterans in Wirral. Quintile 3 had the fewest number of veterans (n=1,462). This was 11.0% of the total number of armed forces veterans.

Figure 3: The proportion of the population, aged 16+, who identified as an Armed Forces Veteran, by Deprivation Quintile and Wirral Local Authority, 2021



Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

Protected Characteristics

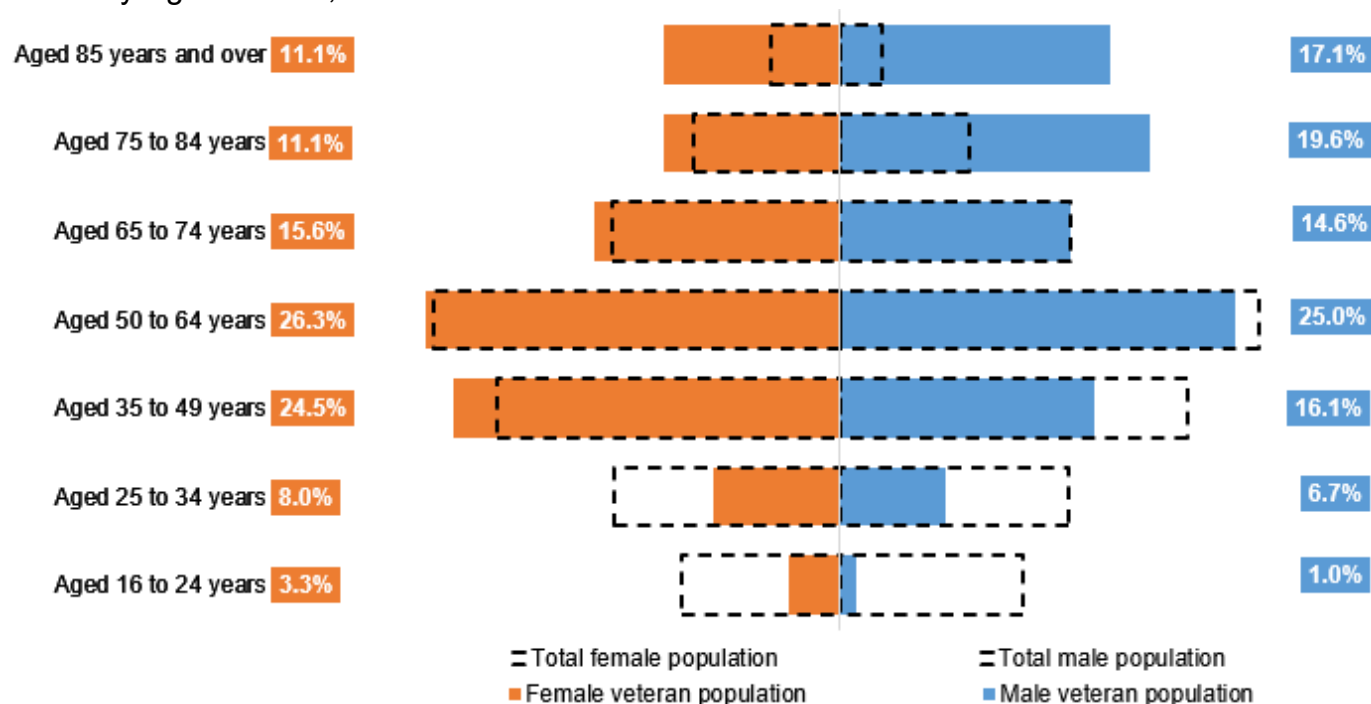
Age and Sex

According to the 2021 Census the majority of armed forces veterans in Wirral were male (87.3%).

Furthermore, almost three quarters (74.7%) of all armed forces veterans in Wirral were aged 50 years and over. In total, two-thirds of all armed forces veterans within Wirral (66.6%, n=8,859) were male *and* aged 50 and over.

The population pyramid below (**Figure 4**) shows that armed forces veterans were more likely to be in the older age groups compared to total population, regardless of gender. Younger veterans (ages 16 to 24 and 25 to 34) were less likely to appear as a proportion of the veteran population with only 8.1% of veterans being of that age, compared to 25.2% of the total population.

Figure 4: Population Pyramid comparing the Veteran Population and Population Aged 16+ in Wirral by Age and Sex, 2021



Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

Note: The population pyramids are overlaid for comparison. Percentages are calculated separately between each sex and population group, meaning they do not share a common denominator. Differences therefore reflect variation in age distribution rather than population size. For example, the percentage of female veterans aged 85 and over is calculated as: number of female veterans aged 85+ divided by the total female veteran population.

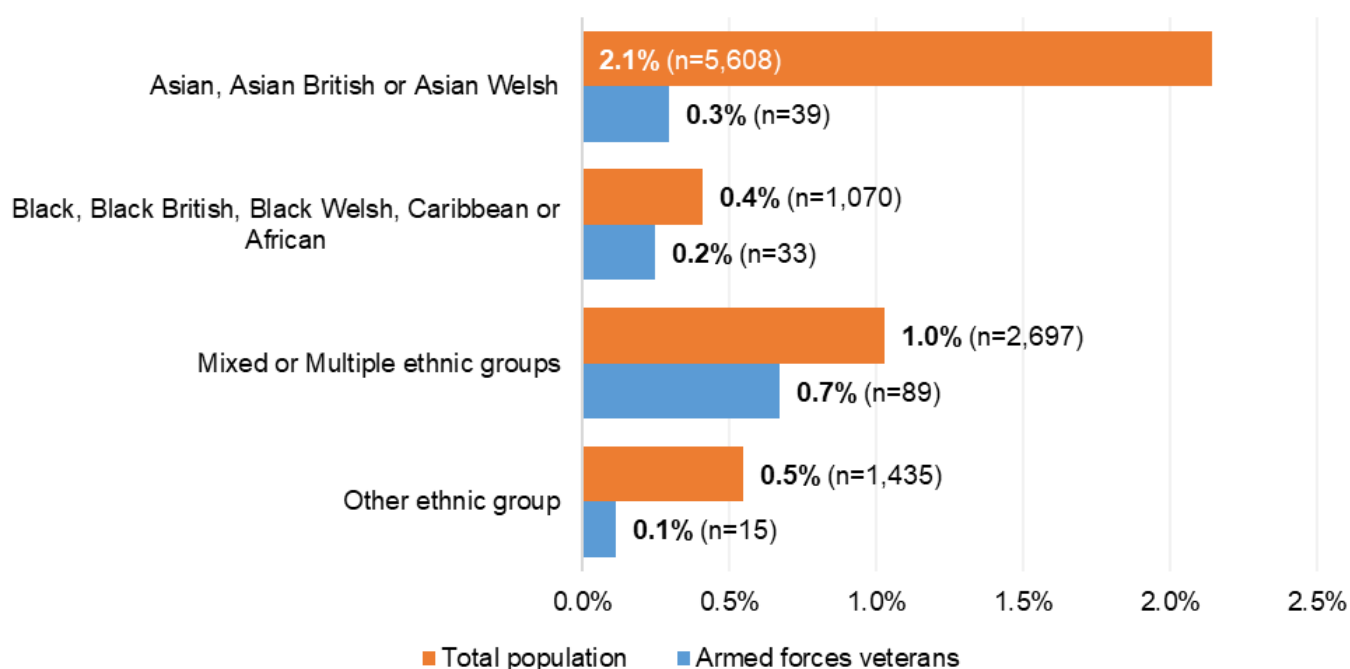
Ethnicity

In Wirral, 95.9% of the population aged 16+ identified as “White” in the 2021 Census. This compares to 87.6% in the North West and 83.0% in England. For armed forces veterans in Wirral, this proportion was even higher, with 98.7% identifying as “White”.

The proportion of the armed forces veteran population in Wirral from ethnically diverse backgrounds is therefore small - accounting for 1.3% (n=176) of the armed forces veteran population. **Figure 5** shows the comparison in the proportion of the high level ethnicity categories (excluding “White”) between the population aged 16+ in Wirral, and the Armed Forces Veterans population in Wirral.

It shows that, for each high level ethnicity category (excluding “White”), there was a lower proportion in the Armed Forces Veterans population compared to the population aged 16+ in Wirral.

Figure 5: Comparison of the Proportion of the Population Aged 16+ and Armed Forces Veterans by Ethnicity (High Level Categories) in Wirral, 2021



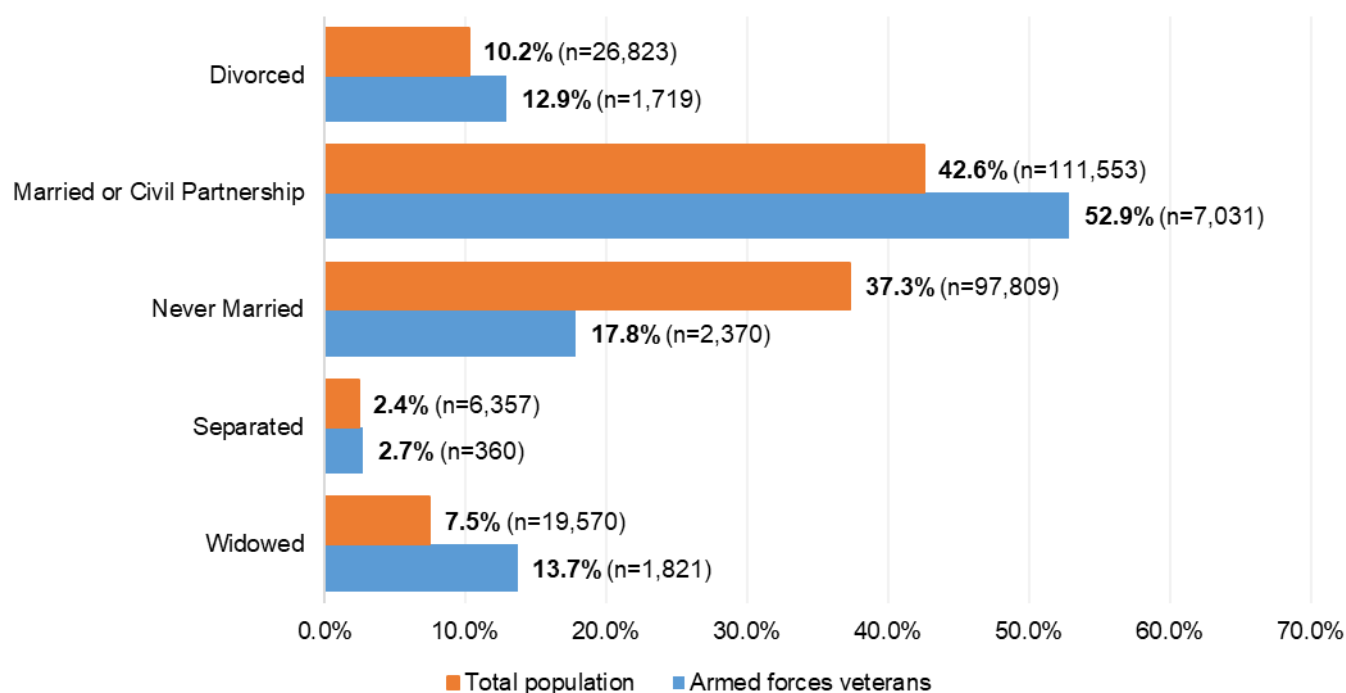
Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

Note: We have excluded the "White" ethnic group from this chart to make it easier to clearly see the differences for the four high-level ethnic groups that account for a smaller percentage of the overall population.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Figure 6 shows that armed forces veterans in Wirral were more likely to be married compared to the total population aged 16+ in Wirral (52.9% compared to 42.6%). The proportion who was widowed was also higher among armed forces veterans (13.7% compared to 7.5%), likely reflecting the older age profile of the veteran population. There was also a larger proportion divorced amongst armed forces veterans compared to the population aged 16+ (12.9% compared to 10.2%), likely for the same reason.

Figure 6: Comparison of the Proportion of the Population Aged 16+ and Armed Forces Veterans by Legal Partnership Status in Wirral, 2021

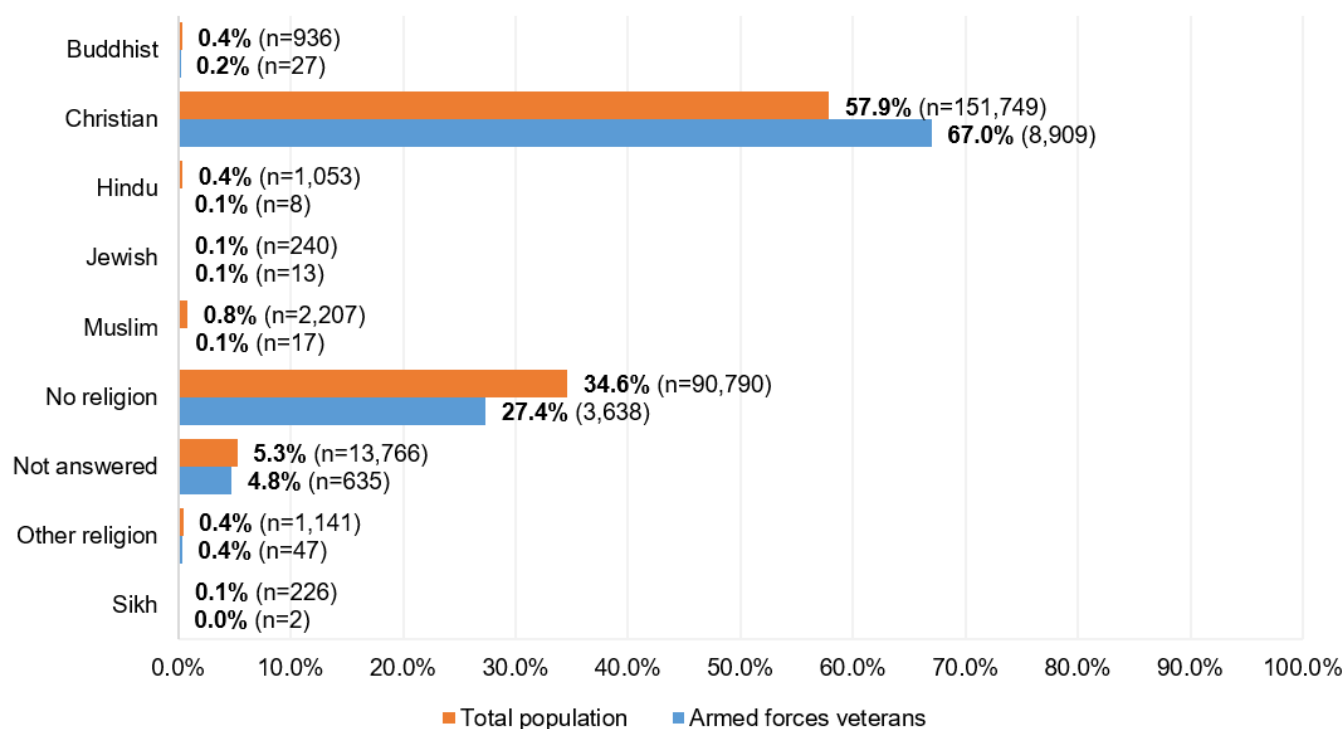


Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

Religion

Religion among Armed Forces Veterans broadly reflects the distribution seen in the overall Wirral population, with Christianity being the dominant religion (**Figure 7**). However, Veterans were more likely to identify as Christian (67.0% vs 57.9%) and less likely to report no religion (27.4% vs 34.6%). Other religious groups represent very small proportions in both populations, with only marginal differences between them.

Figure 7: Comparison of the Proportion of the Population Aged 16+ and Armed Forces Veterans by Religion in Wirral, 2021



Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

Additional Analysis

Country of Birth

The majority of armed forces veterans were born in the UK (97.1%), this is larger than the population of Wirral that were born in the UK (93.9%).

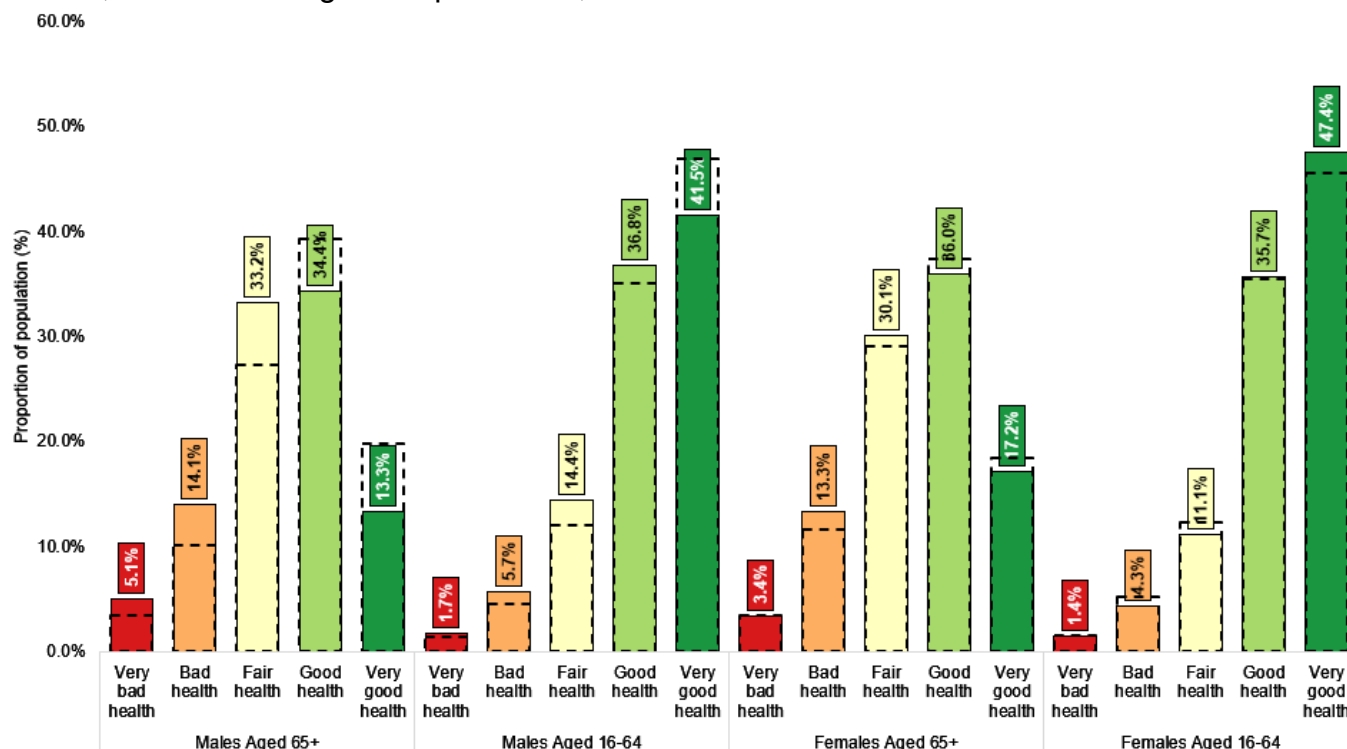
General Health

Armed forces veterans were more likely than non-veterans to report poorer health in Wirral. In total, 13.0% of veterans reported being in very bad or bad health, compared to 8.5% of the non-veteran population (aged 16+).

This, however, hides significant inequalities. When accounting for age and sex, **Figure 8** shows that male veterans aged 65+ were more likely to be in very bad (5.1% compared to 3.4%) or bad health (14.1% compared to 10.2%) compared to non-veteran males aged 65+.

Male veterans aged 16-64 and female veterans aged 65+ were also slightly more likely to report poorer health compared to non-veterans of the same age and sex group in the 2021 Census, whilst female veterans aged 16-64 reported better health than female non-veterans aged 16-64.

Figure 8: Proportion of Veterans (Coloured Bars) and Non-Veterans (Dotted Bars) by Reported Health, Gender and Age Group in Wirral, 2021



Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

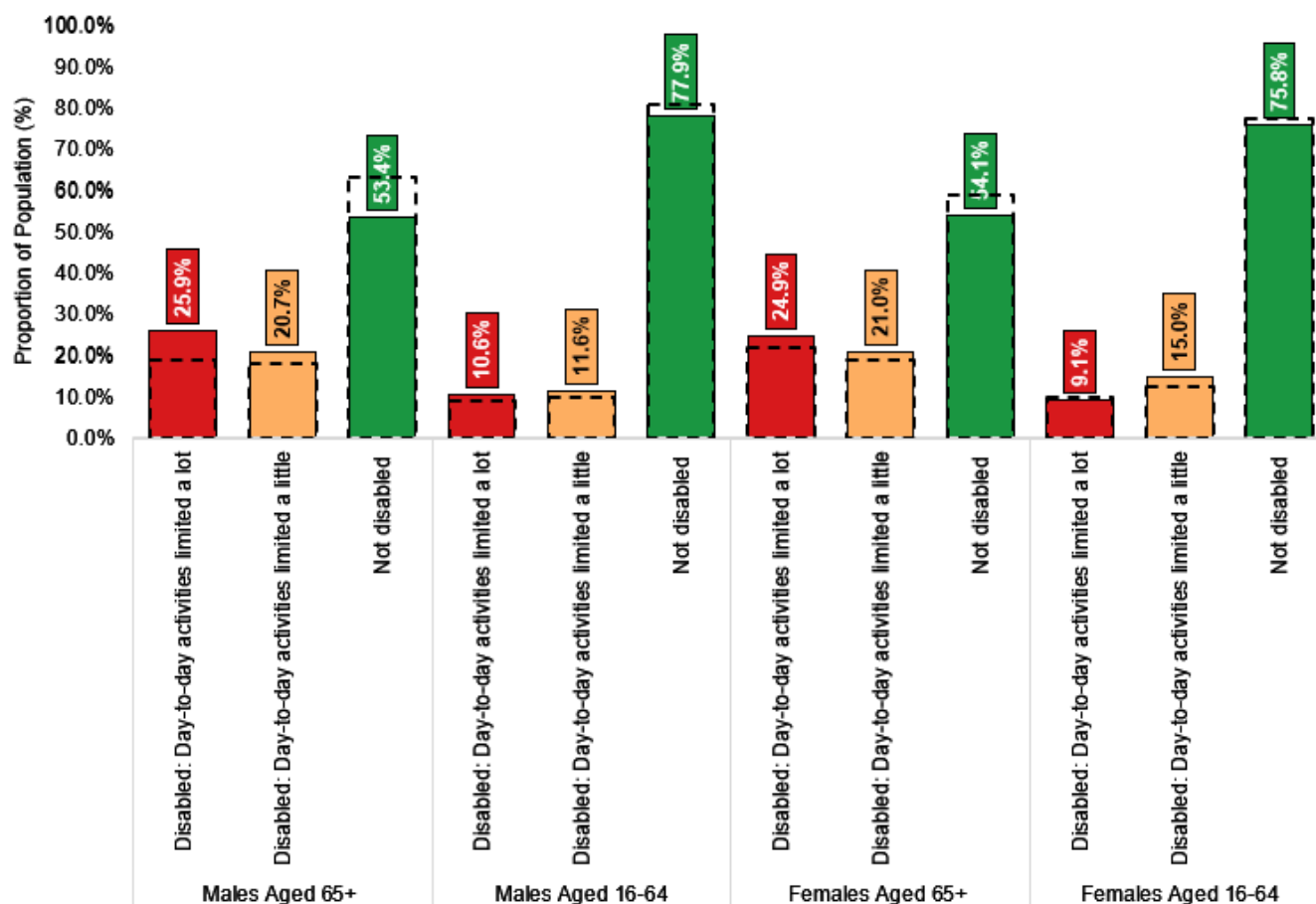
Disability

Armed forces veterans were more likely than non-veterans to report disability in Wirral. In total, 34.4% of veterans reported being disabled a little or a lot, compared to 25.2% of the non-veteran population (aged 16+).

This, however, hides significant inequalities. When accounting for age and sex, **Figure 9** shows that male veterans aged 65+ were more likely to be disabled a lot (25.9% compared to 18.8%) or a little (20.7% compared to 18.1%) compared to non-veteran males aged 65+.

Male veterans aged 16-64 and female veterans across both age groups (16-64 and 65+) were also slightly more likely to report disability compared to non-veterans of the same age and sex group in the 2021 Census.

Figure 9: Proportion of Veterans (Coloured Bars) and Non-Veterans (Dotted Bars) by Reported Disability, Gender and Age Group in Wirral, 2021



Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

For more information on General Health and Disability, please see [Section 4 of the Military Veterans and Their Families Health Needs Assessment](#) produced in 2013.

Living Situation

Communal Establishments

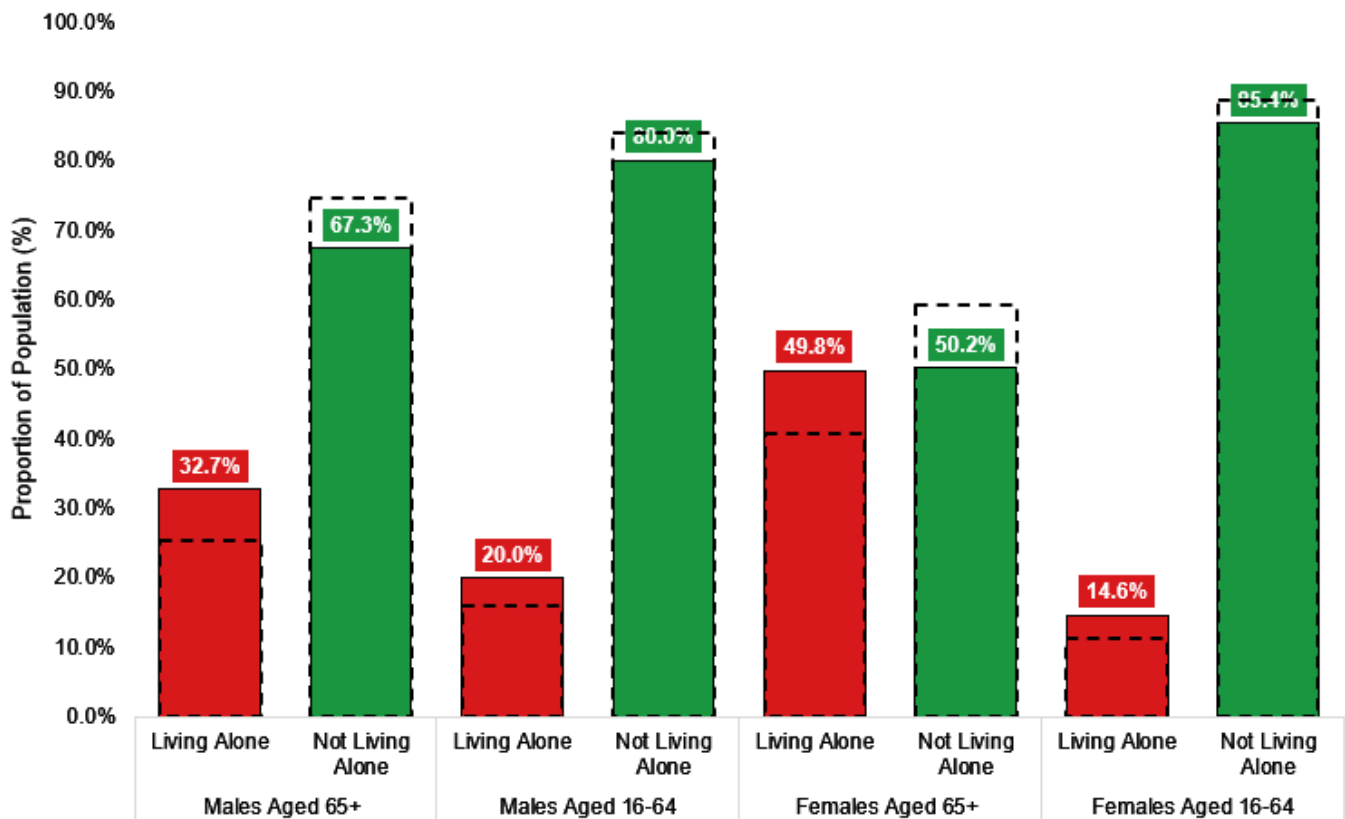
Of the armed forces veteran population in Wirral, 98.5% (n=13,092) lived in households and 1.5% (n=198) lived in communal establishments. This is similar to the breakdown for the population as a whole; 99.0% of usual residents in Wirral lived in households and 1.0% lived in communal establishments.

Living Alone

Armed forces veterans were more likely to live alone compared to non-veterans when accounting for age and sex. In total, 1 in 4 veterans live alone (26.5%). This compares to almost 1 in 5 (18.8%) non-veterans in Wirral. This does hide significant inequalities. For example, **Figure 10** shows that almost 1 in 3 (32.7%) veteran males aged 65 and over were living alone. This compares to 1 in 4 (25.3%) non-veteran males aged 65 and over.

Furthermore, almost half of all female veterans aged 65+ (49.8%) in Wirral were identified as living alone, compared to 40.7% non-veterans. For each age group and sex displayed in **Figure 10**, living alone came out higher for veterans in Wirral compared to non-veterans.

Figure 10: Proportion of Veterans (Coloured Bars) and Non-Veterans (Dotted Bars) by Reported Living Arrangements, Gender and Age Group in Wirral, 2021

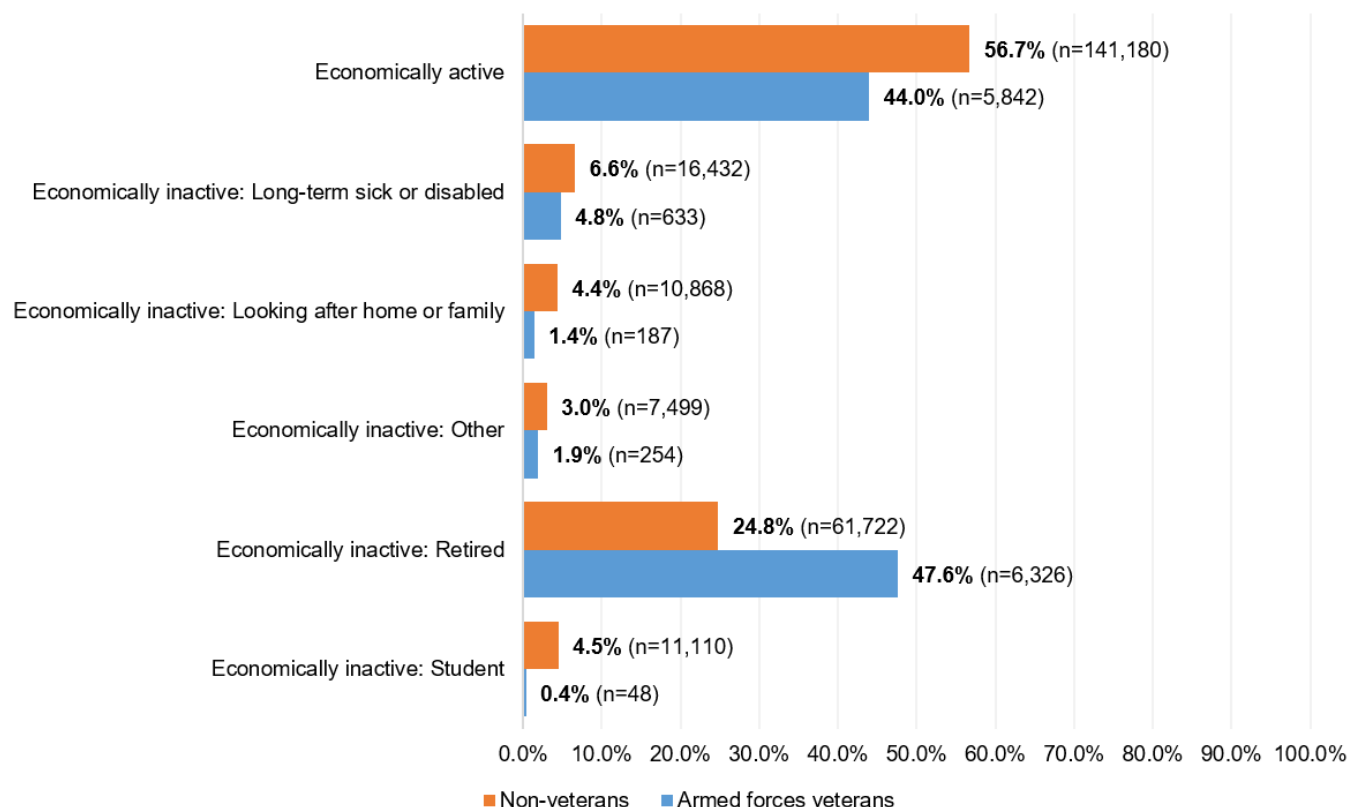


Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

Economic Inactivity

Figure 11 shows the armed forces veterans were more likely to be economically inactive compared to non-veterans. Given the older age profile of veterans in Wirral, almost half were retired (47.6%). This compares to 24.8% of non-veterans. The proportion of the 16+ population that were economically inactive due to long-term sick or disability was higher in non-veterans compared to veterans, even when accounting for age and sex.

Figure 11: Comparison of the Proportion of the Population Aged 16+ and Armed Forces Veterans by Economic Activity Status in Wirral, 2021



Source: [2021 Census via the Office for National Statistics](#)

For more information on Living Situation and Economic Activity, please see [Section 5 of the Military Veterans and Their Families Health Needs Assessment](#) produced in 2013.

Caring Responsibilities

There was no notable difference between the proportion of the armed forces veterans and non-veterans when it comes to caring responsibilities within Wirral. There were 13.0% of armed forces veterans who provide any form of unpaid care identified in the 2021 Census. This compares to 12.6% of the non-veteran population. When accounting for age and sex, the greatest difference between veterans and non-veterans by age and sex was between males aged 35-49. The proportion of veterans of that sex and age group that provide unpaid care was 11.9% (n=222). This is compared to 9.7% of males aged 35-49 in the non-veteran population (n=2,495).

What are we doing and why?

Current activity and services

Armed Forces Covenant

The [Armed Forces Covenant](#) is a promise that together there is acknowledgement and understanding that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, including the bereaved, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives.

Its two principles are that, recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces:

- Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved

NHS

Please visit the '[Healthcare for the armed forces community](#)' NHS webpage for how the NHS can help individuals in the British armed forces or are a veteran, a reservist or a family member of someone who is serving or who has served.

Office for Veterans' Affairs – MoD Veterans Services

MoD Veterans Services provides one-to-one support to veterans, their families and dependants through a network of welfare managers across the UK and Republic of Ireland.

They can help veterans and their families with issues around health, employment, housing, finances, pensions and compensation. For more information please visit: [Access MoD Veterans Services - GOV.UK](#)

Armed Forces and Veterans – Citizens Advice

[Citizens Advice Wirral](#) is a local charity providing advice, information, advocacy and representation across Wirral. We have provided free, impartial and confidential advice, to Wirral residents since 1939, and were formerly known as Wirral Citizens Advice Bureau.

There are many different kinds of financial help available for people in the armed forces, veterans and their families.

Individuals can use information through this resource to find out what financial help might be available to veterans, depending on the situation. Individuals can also use this information to find details of organisations that might be able to help them further.

Wirral Ways

In November 2025, [Wirral Ways produced a case study](#) on how they are supporting veterans on the Wirral. This case study includes what was put in place to help support the veteran, the progress being made so far and why the work they do matters so much.

Key gaps in knowledge and services

Mental Health

Data from the Ministry of Defence for 2024/25 ([UK armed forces mental health annual statistics: financial year 2024/25 - GOV.UK](#)) shows that 1 in 8 UK Armed Forces (12.8%) personnel were seen in military healthcare for a mental health related reason. This was broadly comparable to those seen in the UK in the general population. As a crude comparison, the [Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2023/24](#) carried out by NHS Digital shows that, in England, 13.2% of adults reported discussing their mental health with a GP in the past year. No local figures are available, so it is unclear what the inequalities look like between regional and national figures, nor inequalities within Wirral.

Physical Health

Currently there is not sufficient local health care data to report on the physical health of armed forces veterans in Wirral. Work is underway to identify potential data sources which will allow a better, more detailed understanding of the health of armed forces veterans.

Sexuality

Due to small numbers, data is restricted for the only protected characteristic not covered in this report, sexuality.

Appendix

¹Quintiles: Quintiles are calculated by ranking the 33,755 LSOAs in England from the most to least deprived and dividing them into 5 equal groups (each containing 6,751 LSOAs). The same methodology is applied for deciles whereby LSOAs are grouped into 10 equal groups containing either 3,375 or 3,376 LSOAs. For more information, please visit the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Governments website: [English indices of deprivation 2025: statistical release - GOV.UK](#)

Contact details

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