



Public Attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in Northern Ireland

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June 2018



Foreword

The gap between perception and reality in the context of the Armed Forces community, and specifically for ex-Service personnel, damages opportunities and unbalances sensible policy decisions. Addressing the gap has to start with a clear and evidence-based understanding of what are both the perceptions and the reality. This particular research therefore sits very neatly within the broader Northern Ireland Veterans Health and Wellbeing Study which tackles the reality, as do many other of the reports we at Forces in Mind Trust have funded.

Indeed, it is striking that the results of this public attitude research would not seem wildly out of kilter if derived from the rest of the United Kingdom. The perception that two thirds of veterans are likely to suffer from mental ill health, when the reality is that proportionally the prevalence is barely different to that of the general population, is sadly widespread. It hinders employment prospects, and paints a false picture of what someone gains from their service, and what in turn the ex-Service person brings to society.

This report warrants careful consideration, and I particularly applaud its recommendations which rightly focus on better community integration, and greater awareness of the true nature of the individuals that collectively form the Armed Forces community.

One of the few findings unique to Northern Ireland is the lack of awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant – 80%. I recognize that this is a sensitive issue, but in our other studies, we have demonstrated that considerable work is undertaken that, whilst not necessarily labelled as ‘Covenant’, certainly delivers its principles in all but name. That is not to be complacent, but it is worth being balanced in taking forward work that actually delivers better support, rather than merely gives existing support a better title.

So overall we are gratified that this credible and well-conducted piece of research identifies less of a gulf in perception and support for the Armed Forces community between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom than perhaps we had feared might be the case when we embarked upon the work. There is more to be done, and careful consideration of the sensibly balanced recommendations by all involved would be an excellent place to start.



Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock CBE

Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

Forces in Mind Trust

The Forces in Mind Trust was founded in 2012, through an endowment of £35 million from the Big Lottery Fund, to promote the successful transition of Armed Forces personnel, and their families, into civilian life.

Our Vision is that all ex-Service personnel and their families lead successful and fulfilled civilian lives. Our Mission is to enable them to make a successful and sustainable transition.

Our Strategy is to use our spend-out endowment to fund targeted, conceptually sound, evidence generation and influence activities that will cause policy makers and service delivers to support our Mission.

For full details of what we have funded, our published research, and our application process visit our web site www.fim-trust.org



Acknowledgements

The team would like to thank Paula Devine from Queens University and ARK NI and the rest of her team for sharing their vast experience in public attitudes surveys in helping us develop the questions and including us at every stage of data collection. We would also like to thank Professor Gillian Robinson from Ulster University and ARK NI for being responsive and supportive to us proposing a new schedule of questions for the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS), and for her support in making that happen. Finally, we would like to thank Professor Nicola Fear from Kings' College London. Her support in the development of the questions will ensure comparative work between the UK and NI on public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces is possible and we look forward to working with her on this in future.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the dynamic and steadfast work of Martin Robinson, the PhD researcher working with the NIVHWS, and Dr Emma Walker, whose support when she was a member of the research team helped make this happen.

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Acronyms

AFC	Armed Forces Covenant
CAIN	Conflict Archive on the Internet
GB	Great Britain
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NI	Northern Ireland
NILT	Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey
NIVHWS	Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RIR	Royal Irish Regiment
TRBL	The Royal British Legion
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
UK	United Kingdom
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

Executive Summary

Overview

The current report entitled *Public Attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in Northern Ireland* is the fourth in a series of reports from the Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study (NIVHWS). In 2017, the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) funded the inclusion of the first ever set of questions on public attitudes towards current and former UK Armed Forces personnel in Northern Ireland (NI) in the annual Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT). NILT is a joint project between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University and is representative of the attitudes and opinions of the full NI population. NILT respondents were asked for their opinion on a range of issues related to the UK Armed Forces in NI. Questions focused on respondents' attitudes towards, and opinions of, the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and the UK Armed Forces today; comparisons of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current times; respect for Armed Forces personnel; associations with Armed Forces personnel; alcohol use and the mental health of Armed Forces personnel; the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC); and specialist veteran mental health services in NI. Each of the above topics were examined in regard to one or more key demographic variables, such as age, gender, geographical location and religious affiliation.

Background

UK Armed Forces personnel were deployed to the streets of NI from August 1969 to July 2007. During this time, around 300,000 Regular and Reserve personnel served in NI, with numbers peaking at 30,000 in 1972, but declining to 13,000 in 2001 after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. More than 40,000 of the soldiers serving in NI were 'home service' personnel, who served in either the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), or later the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR). These 'home service' regiments were recruited locally, and often included individuals who served in a part-time capacity alongside their civilian jobs. Both the UK Armed Forces and the civilian population of NI paid a high price during the Troubles with many deaths and Troubles-related injuries (Conflict Archive on the INternet (CAIN), 2018a). The Good Friday Agreement saw the eventual withdrawal of the UK Armed Forces from NI when Operation Banner (the Army Operation) officially ended in 2007 with most paramilitary groups declaring they had decommissioned. The Army in NI now have two Regular battalions and one Reserve (UK Government, 2015). The role the UK Armed Forces played during the Troubles remains contested, and opinions of this are presumed to be divided along national, religious, political, and ethnic divides (e.g. loyalist/Protestant supportive of the UK Armed Forces and republican/Catholic unsupportive).

There is currently a significant number of veterans and their families living in NI. The Royal British Legion (TRBL; 2014) estimated the number of veterans living in NI to be around 56,700; roughly 3% of the population. Including the wider veteran community (e.g. veterans, spouses, divorcees, widow(ers), children), the number rises to around 8% (TRBL, 2014). However, it is pertinent to note that many veterans residing in NI are cautious of disclosing their military affiliations and so may not appear in these figures.

Although the Troubles officially ended twenty years ago with the Good Friday Agreement, security issues for current and former military personnel remain. Several studies (Cochrane, 2013; Evans & Tonge, 2012; Horgan & Morrison, 2011; Tonge, 2014; Whiting, 2014) have also shown that dissident paramilitary

activity has been steadily increasing in post-Troubles NI. Veterans taking part in focus groups conducted for the *Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland* report (Armour et al., 2017b) expressed concerns for their personal safety, claiming they were still vigilant about to whom they disclosed their military past. Such trust issues were reported as barriers to accessing support services for key issues, such as housing and mental health (Armour et al., 2017b).

Throughout the NIVHWS, key actors and participants in the research have indicated the importance of public perceptions of, and attitudes to, military veterans, both in the political sphere, and for veterans themselves. Service providers indicate the difficulty of providing veteran specific services in an environment where issues associated with the UK Armed Forces are politicised, and where there are so many sensitivities involved in championing issues related to veterans. Veterans themselves indicate that they do not feel comfortable accessing some public services, particularly where they might need to disclose their veteran status. Some veterans also expressed that concerns for their personal safety continue to have significant impact on their mental wellbeing.

Currently, Service personnel, their families and veterans in NI can avail of all services afforded to citizens in NI (e.g. statutory health and social care, social housing) and a range of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (see Armour et al. (2017a) for a comprehensive discussion of the VCS supporting veterans in NI). Veterans in NI can also access assistance from the newly established Veterans' Support Office. In spite of these developments, veterans in NI remain slightly different from those in the rest of the UK; many of whom can avail of a range of additional statutory support services related to the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).

In the rest of the UK, the AFC provides a guarantee that those who have served in the UK Armed Forces and their families will not be disadvantaged as a result of their military service. The AFC has two core principles: no member of the current or former Armed Forces community should be disadvantaged compared to other citizens in accessing public and commercial services; and special consideration may be appropriate for some members of the Armed Forces community such as those who have been injured or bereaved (House of Commons Library, 2018). In NI, the implementation of the AFC is impeded by a debate around its compatibility with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act¹.

The political sensitivities around the UK Armed Forces in NI, and the legacy of the Troubles, are said to impact upon the nature of the debate surrounding the AFC (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). In spite of the difficulties adopting the AFC at a national level, several local authorities have adopted its principles and Armed Forces Champions have been appointed in every council – though in NI these are referred to as Veterans' Champions.

Public attitudes in the UK (excluding NI) towards the UK Armed Forces are currently higher than they have been in many years, despite negative views about some of the conflicts in which military personnel have been involved (e.g. Iraq and Afghanistan). There are some misconceptions about those who serve, including a belief that those who have served in the military are at higher risk of poor mental health, but overall the group is viewed positively by the British public. This support is consistent with the tenets of the AFC, which acts as a commitment by the UK government, public and private sectors, and the public to ensure that those who have served in the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged, and that in some special cases they will be provided with additional support. However, despite the overall view of the Armed Forces by the British public being favourable, the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (Ministry of Defence (MOD), 2017) reported that only 41% of Service personnel felt they were valued by society; a decline every year since 2014. This has the potential to have deleterious effects on veterans' mental health outcomes.

¹ Section 75 requires NI public authorities to carry out their functions and duties equally irrespective of gender, ethnicity, political opinion, religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, dependant and marital status.

Methods

The NILT is a joint, annual project, between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, which has collected NI public attitudes for the last two decades. The questions within the NILT survey are grouped into modules and these change each year, depending on the funder and focus, and have included questions on abortion, dementia, Europe, men, pensions, public services and so on. The aims of the survey are to: provide a locally focused resource to be used by the general public; and to generate data for academic and theoretical debate. Many of the modules map on to public attitudes surveys in the rest of the UK. The survey is often used to inform public policy development in NI.

Sample

The 2017 NILT Survey was a cross-sectional survey based on two-stage random samples of adults aged 18 years or over living in private households. The sample size, along with the random sampling procedure enable the survey to provide a statistically-robust way of recording public attitudes. Comparison of demographic characteristics with Census and government surveys ensures that the NILT samples are representative of the population in NI. In other words, the NILT captures an accurate picture of what NI public attitudes are on a range of issues and the possible determinants of these.

Questions on the UK Armed Forces Community living in NI

The NIVHWS study team sought to identify public attitudes in NI towards the UK Armed Forces in NI. To meet this objective, the team adapted questions from existing UK public attitudes surveys, and devised new questions using data from other work packages of the NIVHWS. Researchers then worked with ARK NI to ensure that the questions mapped easily on to the rest of the survey for the sake of continuity, accessibility and ease of administration.

Data Collection

The survey involved more than 1200 face-to-face interviews. The survey was computer-assisted to facilitate interviewer administration and to also allow for easy self-completion, as well as the traditional pen and paper method. Technical notes detailing the full methodology for the NILT survey in 2017-2018 are available, alongside technical notes from previous years, at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets/technotes.html>.

Key Findings

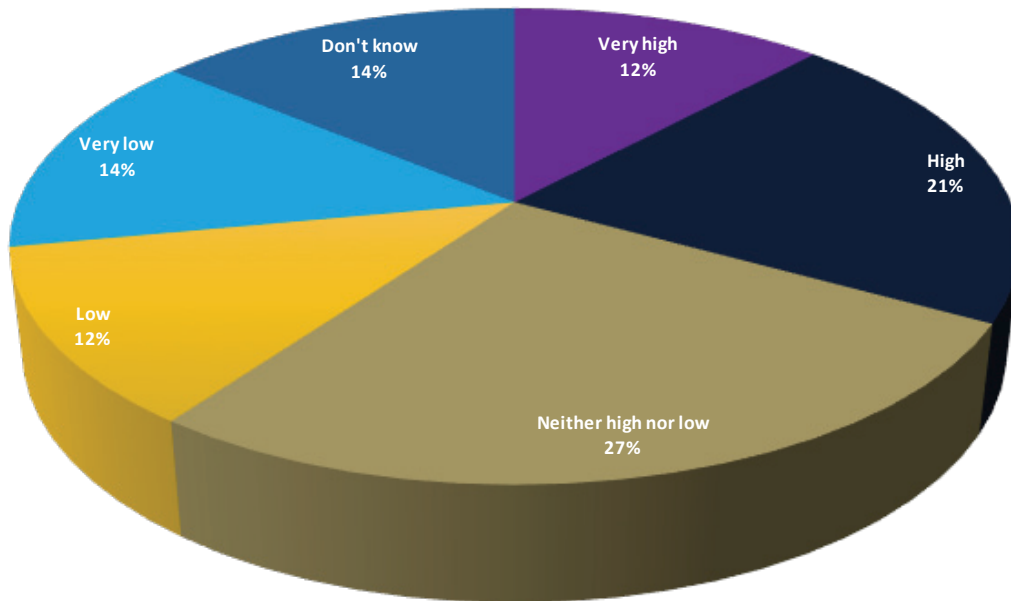
The data collected here as part of the NILT provides the first ever evidence base on the NI public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. The results have the potential to inform discussions on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles as well as how support is provided to the Armed Forces population given the political and legal complexities of the situation.

The following are the key findings of this report:

- One third (33%) of the NI population have a high/very high opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles, whereas a quarter of the population (26%) have a low/very low opinion

Public opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles in NI

Looking back at the past and 'the Troubles' in NI, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?

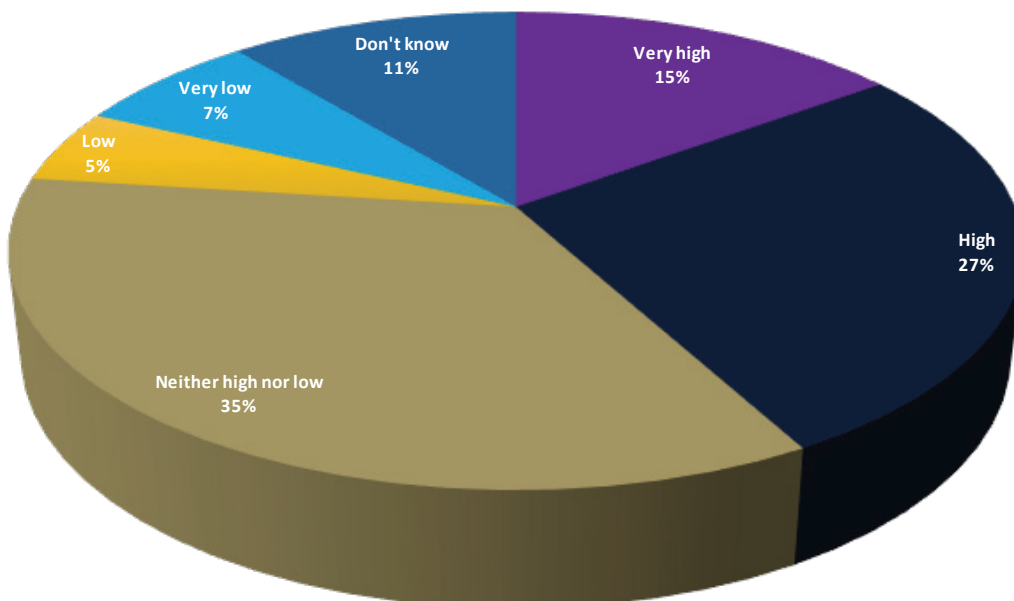


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- In relation to the UK Armed Forces today, the divide is much wider with 42% of the NI population having a high/very high opinion and 12% having a low/very low opinion

Public opinions towards the UK Armed Forces in 2017

Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?

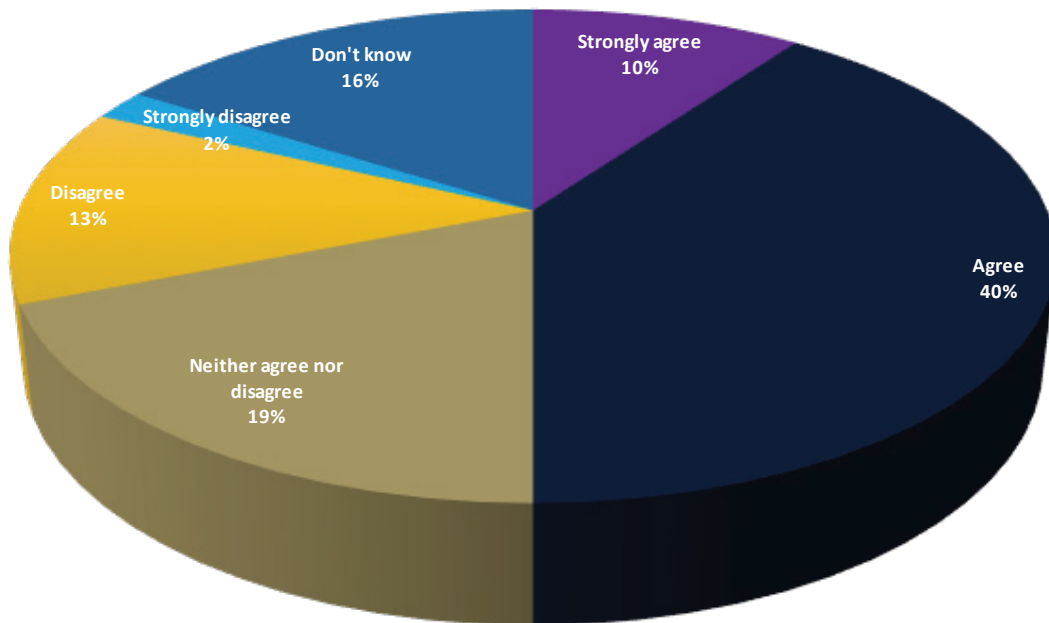


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Based on the two points above, the opinion of the public is more favourable to the UK Armed Forces of today than to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles
- The majority of the NI public (78%) do respect the Armed Forces in general and a total of 62% do not feel more negatively towards the UK Armed Forces who served in NI relative to those who served elsewhere
- The majority of the NI population would feel comfortable/very comfortable if someone who has been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to them (70%), married their close relative (70%), or if someone from their own family joined the UK Armed Forces (63%)
- Half (50%) of the NI population believe that alcohol problems are more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces relative to someone who has not

Public opinions of the alcohol-related problems in the UK Armed Forces

People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have problems with alcohol than those in the general population

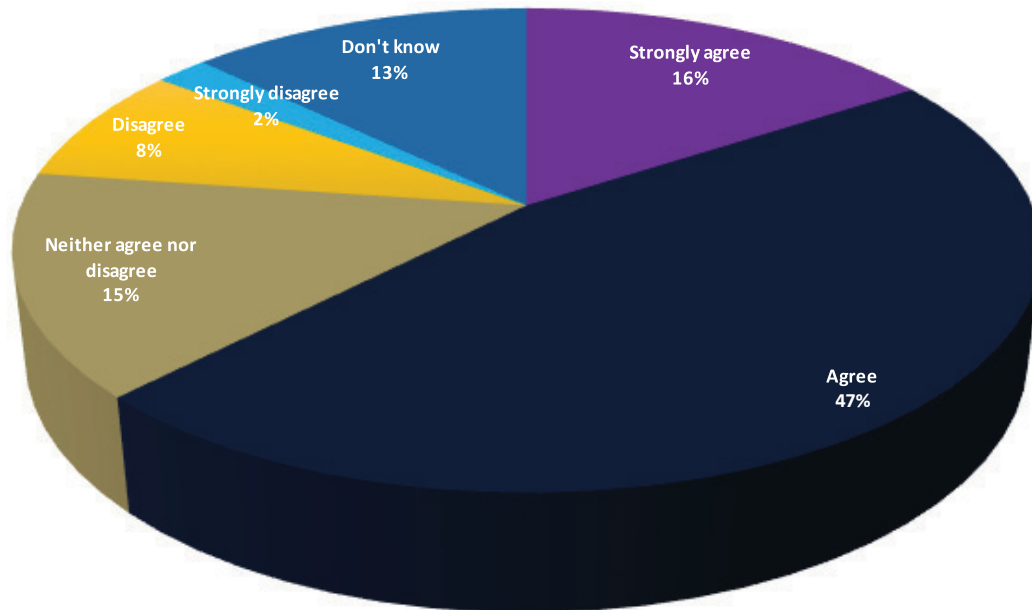


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Over half of the NI public (63%) believe that mental health problems are more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces relative to someone who has not

Public opinions of the mental health issues in the UK Armed Forces

People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have mental health problems than those in the general population



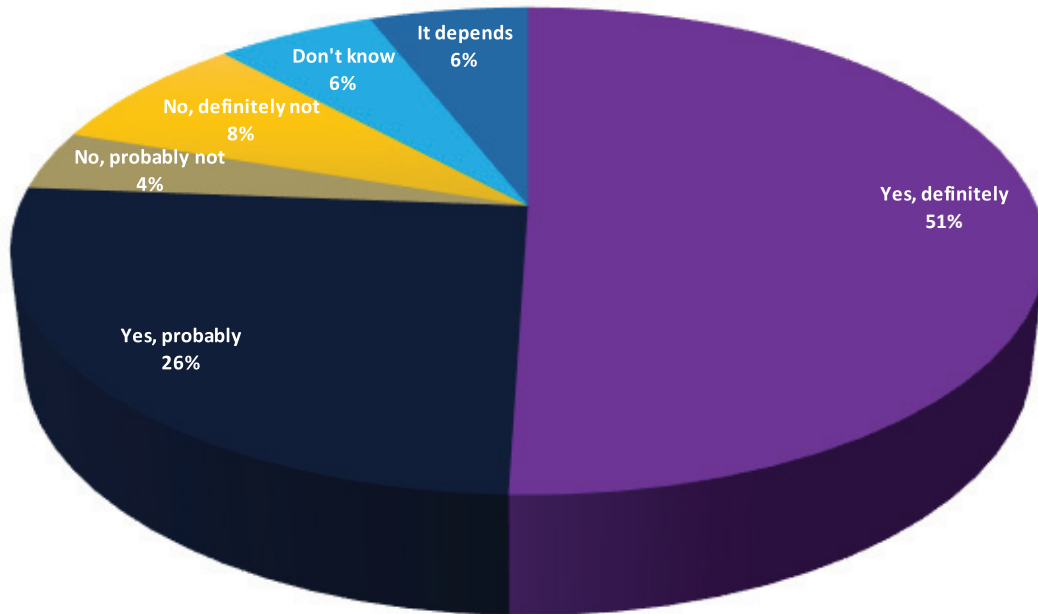
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Fewer people in NI agree (19%) than disagree (30%) that some public services in NI discriminate against those who have been in the Armed Forces, but a large proportion (51%) are undecided or simply do not know
- A quarter of the NI population (25%) agree that people who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in NI due to their military service, but another quarter (26%) disagree, with a half (50%) being undecided or saying they do not know²
- A large majority of the NI population (80%) have not heard of the AFC
- The majority (78%) of people in NI believe it to be fair that an ex-soldier in England is not disadvantaged in getting access to health treatments or housing due to their military service and 72% believe it to be fair if an ex-soldier in England who suffered significant injuries is given priority health treatment or housing
- Two thirds of the NI population (66%) believe it would be fair for an ex-soldier in NI to get priority health treatment or housing if they had significant injuries
- A similarly large proportion of the NI public (67%) also believe that it would be fair for a soldier to keep their place on a housing waiting list whilst they are on deployment
- Almost 70% of the NI population (69%) believe that it would be fair if a soldier with service-related PTSD got priority treatment for their mental health problem
- The majority of the NI population (77%) indicated strong support that a specialist mental health service should be provided in NI for military veterans living in the region; only 12% disagreed with this, the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing

² Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Specialist mental health service in NI for UK Armed Forces

In England there is going to be a specialist mental health service set up for people from the UK Armed Forces...
Do you think that a similar mental health service should be provided in NI for ex-military people living here?



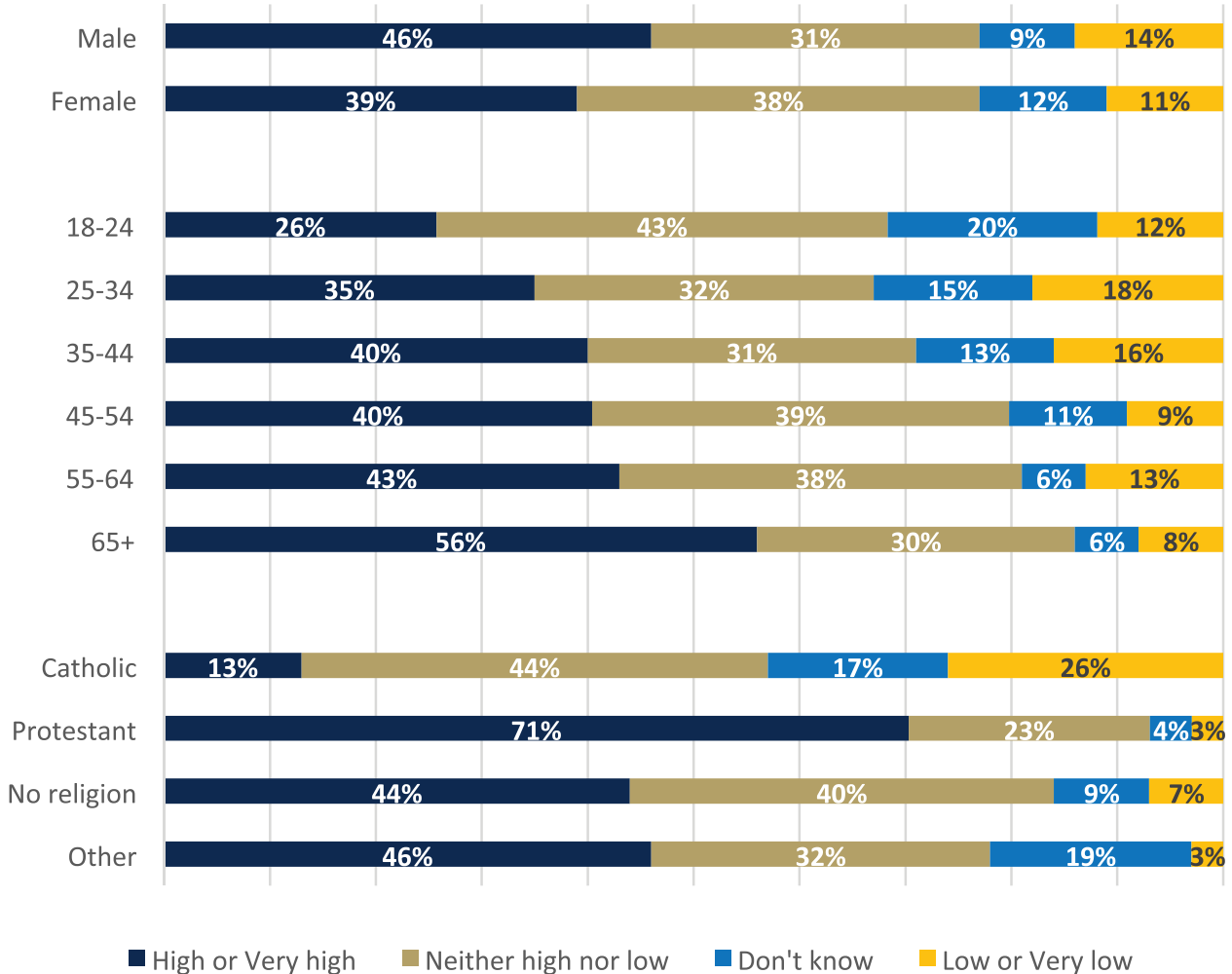
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Many of the above opinions differed depending on one's gender, age, religion, family connections with the Armed Forces, and geographical location. For example³:

³ For demographic breakdown on each question, please refer to the full report

Demographic differences in opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today

Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces in 2017.
What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- The most striking demographic differences emerged in relation to religion, with Catholics expressing markedly fewer positive and more negative opinions relative to Protestants, which reflects the impact of the legacy of the conflict, where allegiances were often drawn in line with religious and national identities

Conclusions

Public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in Great Britain (GB) and NI are positive, although slightly less so in NI, most likely due to the legacy of the Troubles. There were, however, similarities across the nations, with older people being slightly more supportive than younger people. The public in NI and GB are also similar in their willingness to separate out individuals who serve in the Armed Forces from the popularity of particular missions and operations.

Similar to the opinions found in the UK, NI public perceived members of the UK Armed Forces as being more vulnerable to experiencing mental ill-health and have problems with alcohol, compared to the general population. This may be related to how they are often portrayed in the media and it can have

negative impact on military personnel returning to civilian life, as they may be fearful of reporting that they have a problem, in case it impacts on their job prospects or relationships with others.

Differences in opinions were found also across some council areas. For example, more than half of those living in the Antrim and Newtownabbey, and Ards and North Down areas had positive opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. In contrast, relatively high rates of negative opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles were found in Derry and Strabane, Newry, Mourne and Down and in Mid Ulster areas. These findings reflect the political make-up of the councils in these areas – with the areas having the highest rates of positive opinions consistently demonstrating higher rates of voting for Unionist parties, and those with highest rates of negative opinions being areas with a high proportion of votes for Republican and Nationalist parties.

In terms of religion, people identifying as Catholic and those from Catholic communities tend to have negative memories of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles, with many reporting intimidation and discrimination by the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles. These negative memories likely resulted in negative opinions, which may also have been passed down to the younger generations.

While very few respondents in NI were aware of the AFC, the responses to individual scenarios consistently indicated support for its principles. Those with strong family connections with the Armed Forces were more likely to have heard about it. Nevertheless, almost a half of those with strong military connections indicated that they did not know what the AFC was, and this suggests that even though the AFC is not yet in force in NI, there needs to be greater awareness about it, and the benefits it can bring.

The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey conducted with almost 28,000 UK Regular Armed Forces personnel found that only 41% of them believed they were valued by society (MOD, 2017). Since the view of the Armed Forces is slightly more negative in NI, it is likely that veterans feel even less valued. Indeed, research conducted by Armour et al. (2017b) found that veterans who served in NI during the Troubles thought they had been ‘demonized’ and consequently do not receive recognition for their sacrifices. Other research suggests that feeling unsupported by the public can lead to poor mental health in veterans (Karstoft et al., 2015).

The findings suggest that veterans in NI and England hold views that are not in line with actual public attitudes. Increased interaction between the public and those associated with the UK Armed Forces could help to address these discordant perceptions.

Recommendations

Reflecting on the key findings of this report and following on from the previous work carried out in *Supporting and Serving Veterans in Northern Ireland*, we have developed a number of practical recommendations based on the experiences relayed to us throughout this research to date. These recommendations are for the consideration of policy-makers in MOD, NIO and the NI Executive. There are also recommendations for service providers and care commissioners across the statutory and voluntary sectors:

Key Area	Recommendation	Implications
Community Integration and building of relationships between veterans and the community	Local authorities and Armed Forces Charities should work together to develop and promote public engagement activities for veterans in local communities; especially those aimed at targeting different geographical areas and younger people.	Develop improved veteran and community cohesion, trust and understanding helping to strengthen and normalise relationships across NI.
Data collection and monitoring	Public sector agencies should consider monitoring techniques which include veteran status where possible and appropriate. For detailed recommendations on this, see Armour et al. (2017a).	This has the potential to improve understanding of outcomes for this population, and importantly (given the lack of confidence that public services are not discriminating against UK Armed Forces personnel), provide evidence of fair and equal treatment for this population.
Awareness Training	A public facing campaign promoting positive images of veteran mental health and addressing perceptions of alcohol misuse may be beneficial. It may be possible to use data from the forthcoming NIVHWS survey, which includes evidence about mental health and alcohol use in this population.	By addressing the apparent discrepancy between public perceptions of mental health and alcohol misuse, there is the potential to reduce stigma and mitigate reluctance of veterans to disclose these issues for fear of how it may affect their employment and social networks.

Awareness raising about the Armed Forces Covenant amongst service personnel and veterans in NI	A public engagement exercise aimed at ex-Service personnel and their families about the Armed Forces Covenant could improve understanding of the Covenant, its principles, and the situation specific to NI.	It is also important that veterans know what services they can expect to receive, as previous research has revealed a disconnect between what veterans expect and services provided in line with the AFC.
Utilise new and forthcoming evidence base to inform ongoing debate on the adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant in NI	The development of an exploratory committee or working group looking at the issues associated with implementation of the Covenant in NI could help to address real and perceived problems with implementation of the Covenant. In line with recommendations in the Armour et al. (2017a) report, the group could also collect evidence to compare outcomes for veterans in NI versus the rest of the UK.	Having a dedicated group would help coordinate information and debates relating to the AFC. It could examine issues associated with political sensitivities, legal barriers, and language usage in NI. The collection of an evidence base would allow for comparison of outcomes in NI with those in the rest of the UK; which would help distinguish whether or not the lack of formal adoption of the Covenant negatively affects veterans in NI.

Further Research

The previous reports by the NIVHWS have all highlighted the relative absence of research specifically on NI veterans. This research has addressed some gaps in knowledge related to the impact of the legacy of sectarian conflict on public perception of the UK Armed Forces. However, there are a number of potential avenues for further research:

- *The annual incorporation of military-related questions in the NILT survey:* This report presents the findings of the first questions to be asked in the NILT relating to NI public perceptions of the UK Armed Forces. However, this only presents as snapshot in time. It would therefore, be useful to have these same questions (and maybe others) included annually so that public opinions can be mapped over time and any changes highlighted;
- *Explore younger people’s opinions of the UK Armed Forces:* Given many younger people report less positive attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces, despite many of them growing up in post-conflict NI, it would prove useful to focus on those perceptions. This could be done through the incorporation of similar questions included in the Young Life and Times Survey;
- *Identify whether UK Armed Forces personnel are discriminated by some NI statutory services:* The NILT data indicated that respondents with family connections to current or former UK Armed Forces personnel were more likely to think service personnel are discriminated by NI public services and disadvantaged in the NI employment market. Thus, further research in this area could be warranted;

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- *Examine how the NI (and UK as a whole) public develop their perceptions and attitudes of the UK Armed Forces:* The NILT data indicated that the majority of respondents thought current and former military personnel were more likely to have a mental health issue and alcohol problems than the general population. Given that available data suggests otherwise (Hotopf et al., 2006), it would be useful to explore the transmission mechanisms underlying such assumptions due to their potentially very negative impact on military personnel returning to civilian life. For example, such veterans may be fearful of reporting that they have either or both of an alcohol or mental health problem, due to the negatively held public perceptions that they are more likely to suffer such issues, and employers may feel less willing to take a chance on ex-Service personnel if they feel that there is a higher likelihood that they are suffering such problems. In both cases, this might impact ex-Service personnel's job prospects and/or relationships with others (Armour et al., 2017b).

Concluding Remarks

This report shows that while some groups in NI still hold negative views about the UK Armed Forces, the majority of respondents have positive attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. This is in spite of the fact that veterans themselves feel undervalued and even 'demonised' as a result of their time in the military. Many of the findings were consistent with the rest of the UK, with notable exceptions of discrepancies across religious affiliation and geographical regions (both of which could be explained by the historical context of the Troubles in NI). Notably, when comparing views of the Armed Forces during the time of the Troubles to the views of the Armed Forces in current time, opinions are overall more favourable in the latter. Furthermore, the findings show wide-scale public support for the provision of tailored services to veterans, as well as special treatment by public service providers where required. These findings indicate the willingness of the public to separate individual soldiers from the institution of the UK Armed Forces. There are policy implications for these findings; particularly around the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in NI, and the development of veteran-specific services in the region in line with other parts of the UK.

1.0 The Armed Forces in Northern Ireland

Overview:

- Operation Banner
- Post-Troubles
- The relevance of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in NI
- Political attitudes to veteran-specific service provision in NI
- Conclusion

1.1 Operation Banner

UK Armed Forces personnel were deployed to the streets of Northern Ireland (NI) on Operation Banner, from August 1969 to July 2007. According to Ulster University's Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN; 2018a), around 300,000 Regular and Reserve personnel served in NI during the Troubles, with numbers peaking to 30,000 in 1972, but declining to 13,000 in 2001 after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. More than 40,000 of the soldiers serving in NI were 'home service' personnel, who served in either the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), or Royal Irish Regiment (RIR). These 'home service' regiments were recruited locally, and often included individuals who served in a part-time capacity alongside their civilian jobs. These 'home service' soldiers paid a high price, with 203 dead (60 of which were killed after they had left the forces, targeted because of their military connection), and 590 injured⁴. This compares with 454 deaths and 5,672 injuries for other UK Armed Forces personnel (CAIN, 2018b).

The NI civilian population also paid a high price with 30,058 Troubles-related injuries (1969-2003) and 2,426 deaths (1969-2015) (CAIN, 2018b). The role the UK Armed Forces played during the Troubles remains contested, and opinions of this are presumed to be divided along national, religious, political, and ethnic divides (e.g. loyalist/Protestant supportive of the UK Armed Forces and republican/Catholic unsupportive). Public perception of the UK Armed Forces varied, reflecting contentious policies and practices such as people being stopped and searched in the street, homes and belongings being searched without warning, people being questioned, interrogated and interned, and having their freedom to move around the region restricted (see Darby, 2003; Patterson, 2013 for more detailed accounts). Consequently, part of the Good Friday Agreement was the eventual withdrawal of the UK Armed Forces from Northern Irish streets. Operation Banner officially ended in 2007 with most paramilitary groups declaring they had decommissioned. Consequently, the number of military personnel remaining in NI was further reduced to around 5000 Regular and Reserve personnel by 2007 (CAIN, 2018a). The new Royal Irish Regiment reformed with the merger of the former UDR and RIR. The Army now have two Regular battalions and one Reserve in NI (UK Government, 2015).

⁴ CAIN data figures include injuries and deaths post-1998 the official end of the Troubles.

1.2 Post-Troubles

Although there is now a relatively small number of military personnel in NI compared to the numbers stationed during the Troubles, and with a markedly different mandate (e.g. largely for response to external threats), there is still a significant number of veterans and their families living in NI. Indeed, TRBL (2014) estimated the number of veterans living in NI to be around 56,700, roughly 3% of the population. Including the wider veteran community (e.g. veterans, spouses, divorcees, widow(ers), children) the number rises to around 8%, which compares to around 9% in England and Scotland and about 12% in Wales (TRBL, 2014). However, it is pertinent to note that many veterans residing in NI are cautious of disclosing their military affiliations and so may not appear in these figures.

Although the Troubles officially ended twenty years ago with the Good Friday Agreement, security issues for current and former military personnel remain. For example, in March 2009, two off-duty British soldiers were shot dead, and two others were injured, by the Real Irish Republican Army (IRA), outside Massereene Barracks, and in 2015 a dissident republican letter bomb exploded inside Palace Barracks in Holywood. Several studies (Cochrane, 2013; Evans & Tonge, 2012; Horgan & Morrison, 2011, Tonge, 2014; Whiting, 2014) have shown that dissident paramilitary activity has been steadily increasing in post-Troubles NI. Indeed, veterans taking part in focus groups conducted for the *Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland* report (Armour et al., 2017b) expressed concerns for their personal safety, claiming they were still vigilant about to whom they disclosed their military past. Such trust issues were reported as barriers to accessing support services for key issues such as housing and mental health (Armour et al., 2017b).

There have been a number of key events which may also affect public attitudes towards veterans in NI. The publication of the Saville Report in June 2010 marked the completion of the independent inquiry into Bloody Sunday. The report concluded that soldiers of the Parachute Regiment unjustifiably caused the deaths of 13 people and injured a similar number who were not posing a threat of causing death or serious injury. Public responses to the findings have been mixed, with some calls for the prosecution of those involved. This follows the 2005 establishment of the Historical Enquiries Team, set up by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to investigate 3,269 unsolved murders (some involving former Armed Forces personnel) committed during the Troubles. However, funding for the Historical Enquiries Team was cut in 2014 and since then there has been a robust debate in public, political and media circles on whether to continue investigations on historic allegations of crimes by former UK Armed Forces personnel who served in NI (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017).

1.3 The relevance of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in NI

Throughout the NIVHWS, key actors and participants in the research have indicated the importance of public perceptions of, and attitudes to, military veterans, both in the political sphere, and for veterans themselves. Service providers indicate the difficulty of providing veteran specific services in an environment where issues associated with the UK Armed Forces are politicised, as well as the sensitivities involved in championing issues related to veterans. Veterans themselves indicate that they do not feel comfortable accessing some public services, particularly where they might need to disclose their veteran status. Some veterans also expressed that concerns for their personal safety continue to have significant impact on their mental wellbeing (see Armour et al. (2017b) for more details).

Recent publications from the NIVHWS indicate that veterans in NI have complex needs (Armour et al., 2017b), including issues with employment (e.g. training, identity management, cultural adjustment), physical and mental health (e.g. prosthetics, PTSD), domestic (e.g. bills, food, rent), social and emotional

(e.g. comradeship, feeling part of a network), finance (e.g. money management, welfare) and the need for a safe space (e.g. a drop-in centre, non-judgemental and like-minded people). Whilst many of these needs are similar to those faced by the wider population in NI, there are several areas of support where veteran specific services are deemed to be more appropriate. This is particularly the case in mental health services, where veterans repeatedly indicated a reluctance to engage in treatment with a professional who does not have military-specific training.

Currently, Service personnel, their families and veterans in NI can avail of all services afforded to citizens in NI (e.g. statutory health and social care, social housing) and a range of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (see Armour et al. (2017a) for a comprehensive discussion of the VCS supporting veterans in NI). Veterans in NI can also access support from the Veterans' Support Office; a newly established centralised body borne from recommendations of the *Supporting and Serving Military Veterans in Northern Ireland* report from the NIVHWS team (Armour et al., 2017a). The Veterans' Support Office links individuals to the NI Veterans' Support Committee and, where necessary, to veterans' champions within the eleven government departments and health trusts across the region. In spite of these developments, veterans in NI remain slightly different from those in the rest of the UK; many of whom can avail of a range of additional statutory support services related to the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).

In the rest of the UK, the AFC provides a guarantee that those who have served in the UK Armed Forces and their families will not be disadvantaged as a result of their military service. The AFC has two core principles: no member of the current or former Armed Forces community should be disadvantaged compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and special consideration may be appropriate for some members of the Armed Forces community, such as those who have been injured or bereaved (House of Commons Library, 2018). This commitment is actioned through specialist services, exemptions related to some eligibility requirements for schools and public housing, and more. The AFC is underpinned by an investment of £10m per annum (Gov.UK, 2016). In NI, the implementation of the AFC is impeded by a debate around its compatibility with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

1.4 Political attitudes to veteran-specific service provision in NI

Unlike in other regions of the UK, there are concerns that the implementation of the AFC in NI could provide preferential access to cross-government services for military personnel and thus contravene Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. Section 75 requires NI public authorities to carry out their functions and duties equally irrespective of gender, ethnicity, political opinion, religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, dependant and marital status. While a number of key actors have stated that the first principle of the AFC is in keeping with the spirit of Section 75 (e.g., the Committee on the Administration of Justice), evidence presented to the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee meeting (2013) suggested that much of the opposition relates to political and public perceptions toward the UK Armed Forces and their role during the Troubles.

In evidence provided to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, human rights groups argued that the spirit of the first principle of the AFC is in keeping with NI's equality legislation, and that it would only be the second principle that could prove to be complicated (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). However, the independent non-governmental organisation Committee on the Administration of Justice has argued that there is not a significant conflict between dealing appropriately with the welfare, housing and health needs of current and former Armed Forces personnel and the NI equalities framework (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). The NGO points to similar specific measures that have been provided in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's anti-poverty strategy, which

provides support to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups, or the NI Executive's decision to fund women's groups but not men's (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013).

Overall, it was determined by the committee that Section 75, being no stricter than equality legislation in the rest of the UK, should not be a practical barrier to implementation of the AFC (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). Lord Ashcroft's Veteran Transition Review takes this one step further and calls for the amendment of Section 75 to include veterans as a protected group, citing the amendment of the legislation to include those who identify as Travellers, and states firmly that veterans in NI are experiencing discrimination and disadvantage without implementation of the AFC in the region (Ashcroft, 2014; 2017).

The political sensitivities around the UK Armed Forces in NI, and the legacy of the Troubles, are said to impact upon the nature of the debate surrounding the AFC (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). This concern has been reflected to a certain extent in recent debates in the NI Executive (prior to its suspension), where Members of the Local Assembly (MLAs) debated on whether or not to appoint a representative from NI to the Armed Forces Covenant Reference Group. Although the majority of the MLAs who participated were supportive of representation for NI on the group, those who did not give their support expressed significant objections relating to historical perceptions of the Armed Forces and their role in NI. According to the Minister of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, although those opposed to the AFC have an unfavourable view of the UK Armed Forces as an institution, there was a strong recognition of the need to support veterans (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2016). In spite of the difficulties adopting the AFC at a national level, several local authorities have adopted its principles and Armed Forces Champions have been appointed in every council – though in NI these are referred to as Veterans' Champions.

1.5 Conclusion

The UK Armed Forces actively deployed to the streets of NI throughout Operation Banner during the Troubles, which makes this region of the UK unique in comparison to GB. In addition, a significant number of those Armed Forces personnel were part of the two 'home service' units (UDR and RIR). Many of the estimated 56,700 veterans living in NI (TRBL, 2014) are likely to be from those 'home service' units. Living in one's former theatre of combat is also relatively unique for former UK Armed Forces personnel. As discussed throughout this chapter, Northern Irish public attitudes toward current and former Armed Forces personnel are likely to be polarised because of the role the Armed Forces played during the Troubles. The extreme sensitivity on both sides surrounding the involvement of the UK Armed Forces in the Troubles is likely to affect the nature of the debate on implementation of the AFC in NI (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017).

Key Points:

- NI is the only part of the UK where the Armed Forces have been actively deployed;
- The situation of 'home service' veterans means many of those who served in NI are still living in their former 'operational theatre';
- The role of the UK Armed Forces in NI has been contentious, and it is likely that public attitudes towards this population will be polarised along key and distinct demographic constructs, e.g., age, gender and religion;
- More than 57,000 veterans are estimated to live in NI.

2.0 Public attitudes toward the Armed Forces in Britain

Overview:

- Introduction
- Public attitudes in Britain
- Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

Public attitudes in the UK (excluding NI) towards the UK Armed Forces are currently higher than they have been in many years, despite negative views about some of the conflicts in which military personnel have been involved (e.g. Iraq and Afghanistan). There are some misconceptions about those who serve, including a belief that those who have served in the military are at higher risk of poor mental health (Ashcroft, 2017), but overall the group is viewed positively by the British public. This support is consistent with the tenets of the AFC, which acts as a commitment by the UK government, public and private sectors, and the public to ensure that those who have served in the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged, and that in some special cases they will be provided with additional support. This chapter will explore the attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in more depth, as well as the relevance of this to the implementation of the AFC in the UK. Finally, it will introduce the potential differences between NI and the rest of the UK with regard to support for the Armed Forces.

2.2 Public attitudes in Britain

Hines et al. (2015) argued that the relationship between the UK Armed Forces and the UK public has often been uneasy because of the absence of the Armed Forces in everyday society, stifling the opportunity for shared experiences, mutual understanding and support. McCartney (2011) argued that the public image of the British Soldier has tended to fluctuate between three stereotypes: the hero; the victim; and the villain. In short, the 'hero' celebrates soldiers' bravery and willingness to give their life for national security. The image of the soldier as 'victim' centres on the loss of life, casualties from asymmetrical warfare (such as roadside bombs in Afghanistan) or the government not providing troops with necessary equipment. Finally, reporting on illegal killings in combat or brawling in bars at home are the type of things which may portray soldiers as 'villains.'

According to Hussain and Ishaq (2005) there has been a major debate since the mid-1990s, in both military and political circles, about the relationship between military and civilian society. This is related to the difficulties of recruitment and retention in the UK Armed Forces. The declining relationship has been attributed to a changing society whose values are not entirely consistent with or supportive of the military (Strachan, 2000). This has been attributed to unpopular military operations (e.g. the 2003 invasion of Iraq) and concerns over the treatment of some minority groups in the military.

Hines et al., (2015) suggested that the civil-military divergence in the UK has resulted in public opposition toward the 2001 Afghanistan conflict, and 2003–2009 Iraq war, and questioning of the evidence for military operations. NatCen Social Research (2012) found that 58% of the GB population thought that military personnel should

not have been sent to Iraq, and 48% thought the same about Afghanistan. Hussain and Ishaq's (2005) study conducted with a random sample of 500 people from the general population reported that the British public appear to be more pacifist than in previous decades. However, a relatively recent YouGov (2014) poll suggested that with the threat of attacks by ISIS on the UK streets, the public appear to be more supportive of operations against ISIS. This support decreases when asked about taking sides in the Syrian civil war.

There is also evidence of public concern that women and ethnic minorities are not treated fairly (Gribble et al., 2014; Hussain & Ishaq, 2005). Respondents to a YouGov (2014) poll suggested that the Armed Forces need to modernise, so that women could serve in close-combat roles and the Armed Forces could become more socially diverse. However, Hines et al. (2015) suggested that the modernising steps the Armed Forces have taken have been overlooked by the public, because of some media over-sensationalising stories, and negative reporting.

Despite reservations about specific aspects of the Armed Forces and their operations, the surveys conducted over the last two decades (e.g. Gribble et al., 2014; Hussain & Ishaq, 2005; NatCen Social Research, 2012; YouGov, 2014) have shown that the majority of the respondents viewed the Armed Forces as doing a good job. Indeed, the British Social Attitudes survey (NatCen Social Research, 2012) found that 83% of the GB population have a 'high' or 'very high' opinion of the Armed Forces, and this differs across age groups: 92% of the 65+ year olds and 73% of the 18-34 year olds have a high or a very high opinion. Only minor differences were expressed in support of military personnel according to political affiliation, with Conservatives being slightly more supportive. NatCen Social Research (2012) also found that 77% of all respondents reported that their attitude towards the Armed Forces has stayed the same, with 18% reporting that their attitude had improved since the withdrawal of personnel from Iraq. Additionally, 75% of respondents thought that military personnel deserved a great deal of respect, linking to the image of the soldier as 'hero'. They also expressed concerns that personnel were more likely to have a mental illness, and experience suicidal tendencies, thus reflecting an image of Armed Forces personnel as 'victims'.

Despite the overall view of the Armed Forces by the British public being favourable, the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (Ministry of Defence (MOD), 2017) reported that only two fifths (41%) of Service personnel felt they were valued by society; a decline every year since 2014. This has the potential to have deleterious effects on veterans' mental health outcomes (Karstoft et al., 2015).

2.3 Conclusion

According to the NatCen Social Research's (2012) British Social Attitudes⁵ survey, the majority of the GB population are clearly supportive of the Armed Forces. This has remained relatively constant since the Armed Forces were withdrawn from operations in Iraq. Many of the findings support the theory that attitudes towards the military can be classified into some more stereotypical views: soldier as 'hero', soldier as 'villain', or soldier as 'victim'. Though it is worth noting that most negative opinions expressed (the 'villain' stereotype) were centred on conflicts and deployments themselves, as opposed to individual Armed Forces personnel. The public do appear to have conceptions of those who have served in the military as having a higher propensity towards alcohol misuse and poor mental health. Regardless, the overarching sentiment towards the UK Armed Forces is one of approval. In spite of this, a large proportion of military personnel do not feel valued by society. Of note is the fact that much of the survey's questions (British Social Attitudes Survey) related to overseas conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the attitudes of those living in NI are not reflected. The following chapters will explore the issues specific to NI with regard to public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. This study seeks to redress this gap.

⁵ It is difficult to gauge Scottish public opinions as NatCen's partner organisation ScotCen Social Research does not appear to have asked the same question of the Scottish public.

Key Points:

- The British public are largely supportive of the Armed Forces;
- Support appears to have been relatively stable since 2009;
- Armed Forces personnel feel undervalued by the general public in spite of these positive attitudes;
- The experiences of the members of the Armed Forces in GB and NI are different and so public attitudes to them are also likely to vary.

3.0 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey

Overview:

- Introduction
- Sample
- Questions on the UK Armed Forces community living in NI
- Data collection
- Conclusion

3.1 Introduction

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey is a joint, annual project between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, which has collected NI public attitudes for the last two decades. The questions within the NILT survey are grouped into modules and these change each year, depending on the funder and focus, and have included questions on abortion, dementia, Europe, men, pensions, public services and so on. The aims of the survey are to: provide a locally focused resource to be used by the general public; and to generate data for academic and theoretical debate. Many of the modules map on to public attitudes surveys in the rest of the UK. The survey is often used to inform public policy development in NI. In 2017, the team responsible for the NILT survey invited contributors to propose potential modules of questions. The NIVHWS asked the Forces in Mind Trust to fund a module with questions on NI public attitudes toward the UK Armed Forces Community living in NI. The rationale for doing this work was two-fold: 1) given public attitude surveys in England, this was always on the research agenda for NI, and 2) earlier work with veterans in the region highlighted that understanding public opinions of Armed Forces and veterans was an important issue for veterans themselves. Indeed, veterans had reported feeling that there were significant negative attitudes towards them and some identified this as a source of anxiety or distress. Some key actors believed that the idea of providing specialist services to veterans, as is done under the AFC in other regions of the UK, would be politically unacceptable to the public in NI (Armour et al., 2017a; 2017b), however there was no evidence to support or refute this. To gain some insight into the validity of these assumptions, and to provide an evidence base with which to compare public attitudes of the NI with the rest of the UK, a module of questions was developed in conjunction with the NILT team. These were part of the larger questionnaire which included questions relating to minority ethnic people, community relations, aging, political attitudes, paramilitary activity and community safety.

3.2 Sample

The 2017 NILT Survey was a cross-sectional survey based on two-stage random samples of adults aged 18 years or over living in private households. This sampling methodology reflects the lack of a comprehensive individual-level sampling frame in NI. The first sampling stage involves randomly selecting a household using the Postal Address File. The second stage involves randomly selecting one adult of eligible age. The sample size, along with the random sampling procedure enable the survey to provide a statistically-robust way of recording public attitudes. Comparison of demographic characteristics with Census and government surveys indicates that the NILT samples are representative of the population in Northern

Ireland⁶. What this design aimed to achieve was to obtain a representative sample of adults living in NI in terms of gender, age, location, socioeconomic circumstances, religion (if any), political persuasion, engagement with NI services, and so on. In other words, capture an accurate picture of what NI public attitudes are on a range of issues, including the possible determinants of these.

3.3 Questions on the UK Armed Forces community living in NI

The NIVHWS study team sought to identify public attitudes in NI towards veterans in the region, to examine attitudes towards the provision of specialist services to veterans, and to develop questions which would allow for comparison between NI and the rest of the UK. To meet these objectives, the team adapted questions from existing UK public attitudes surveys, and devised new questions using data from other work packages of the NIVHWS. Researchers then worked with ARK NI to ensure that the questions mapped easily on to the rest of the survey, for the sake of continuity, accessibility and ease of administration.

The specific questions asked about the UK Armed Forces Community living in NI were:

Q1. Looking back at the past and ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?

Q2. Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces today in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?

Q3. How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be if...

- Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to you?
- Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces married a close relative of yours?
- Someone in your family joined the UK Armed Forces?

Q4. How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

- I don't respect the Armed Forces of any country.
- I feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in Northern Ireland than I do about those who fought in other conflicts.

Q5. Have you heard of the Armed Forces Covenant?

Q6. The Covenant is an agreement that promises that members of the UK Armed Forces will never be put at a disadvantage in getting access to things like health treatments or housing because of their time in the military. Thinking about an ex-soldier living in England, do you think that this is generally fair or unfair?

Q7. The Covenant also includes a promise that members of the UK Armed Forces may get priority health treatment or housing if they face special issues as a result of their time in the military, for example if they were significantly injured. Thinking about an ex-soldier living in England, do you think that this is generally fair or unfair?

Q8. The Armed Forces Covenant does not apply in Northern Ireland. Some people would like the rules extended to here, but others feel that they are unfair or unnecessary. Suppose there was an ex-soldier

⁶ <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets/technotes.html>

living in Northern Ireland. If this soldier was given priority health treatment or housing, because they had received significant injuries, do you think that this would be generally fair or unfair?

Q9. Frank was a soldier in Afghanistan before returning to his home town of Belfast. Before joining the army, he was on the waiting list for a Housing Executive house but because he spent so much time away from home, he had to go back to the bottom of the housing waiting list. Do you think that it would be fair or unfair if the rules allowed Frank to keep his place on the waiting list and not have to start again?

Q10. Anna was also a soldier in Afghanistan before returning to her home in Enniskillen. She suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder because of her experiences in Afghanistan. If she lived in England she would get priority treatment for this disorder because her condition was related to her military experiences. Do you think it would be fair or unfair if the rules in Northern Ireland also allowed Anna to get priority treatment for her condition?

Q11. How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

- Some public services in Northern Ireland discriminate against people who have been in the UK Armed Forces
- People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have problems with alcohol than those in the general population
- People who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in Northern Ireland due to their military service
- People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have mental health problems than those in the general population

Q12. In England there is going to be a specialist mental health service set up for people from the UK Armed Forces. This will provide help for people living in England who have mental health problems that are a direct result of their experiences in the military. Do you think that a similar mental health service should be provided in Northern Ireland for ex-military people living here?

3.4 Data Collection

The survey involves more than 1200 face-to-face interviews. The survey is computer-assisted to facilitate interviewer administration and to also allow for easy self-completion, as well as the traditional pen and paper method. It includes a comprehensive demographic component at the start of the survey, allowing for the comparison of a range of key variables related to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, educational attainment and more. The survey is first tested through a pilot process with at least 30 participants in a range of geographical areas. All interviews were carried out by experienced interviewers employed by Perceptive Insight.

Through the process of the pilot survey, the NILT team worked with the NIVHWS team to identify areas which were confusing or particularly sensitive. Amendments were made based on these suggestions where appropriate. In particular, some more sensitive questions were included in a self-report survey alongside other sensitive questions included in the survey. The longer questions, presenting case studies of individuals, were presented to the respondents on cards in order to give them a chance to both hear the question read and to read it themselves. Technical notes detailing the full methodology for the NILT survey in 2017-2018 are available, alongside technical notes from previous years, at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets/technotes.html>.

3.5 Conclusion

It has been suggested that the debate on the implementation of the AFC in NI is affected by the assumption of negative public attitudes in the region toward the UK Armed Forces. Given that many veterans who have participated in the NIVHWS share this perspective, and the negative impact this has on their mental wellbeing and willingness to engage with public services, the NIVHWS believed it was important to develop an evidence base to explore these issues. The placement of these questions in a well-established public attitudes survey supported the collection of the data required within the time frame of the NIVHWS without the development of an additional work package.

Key Points:

- NILT is an annual survey about NI public attitudes to a range of issues;
- In 2017 FiMT funded the first ever questions in NILT about the UK Armed Forces;
- The 2017 NILT Survey was a cross-sectional survey based on two-stage random samples of adults aged 18 years or over living in private households;
- Questions related to the UK Armed Forces at different points in time, perceptions of veteran mental health and wellbeing, and attitudes towards the provision of specialist services to this population.

4.0 Public attitudes toward the Armed Forces in Northern Ireland

Overview:

- Introduction
- Results
 - The UK Armed Forces during the Troubles
 - The UK Armed Forces today
 - Comparisons of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current times
 - Respect for Armed Forces personnel
 - Associations with Armed Forces personnel
 - Alcohol use and mental health of Armed Forces personnel
 - The Armed Forces Covenant
 - Specialist mental health services in NI
- Summary of Results

4.1 Introduction

This section will provide an overview of the findings of the FiMT funded module of questions on public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in NI. These results form the first ever public attitudes data set on the military in NI. The findings, which examine results across a range of demographic variables, will help to gain a better understanding of the attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in a post-conflict society. This has the potential to inform discussions on dealing with the legacy of armed conflict in the region as well as how support is provided to this population given the political and legal complexities of the situation.

4.2 Results

The findings are presented by theme and include the following areas: attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces, both historical and present day, and respect for Armed Forces personnel; acceptability of associations and contact with Armed Forces personnel; perceptions of the mental health and wellbeing of veterans; knowledge of and attitudes towards the Armed Forces Covenant; and attitudes towards specialist services for this population.

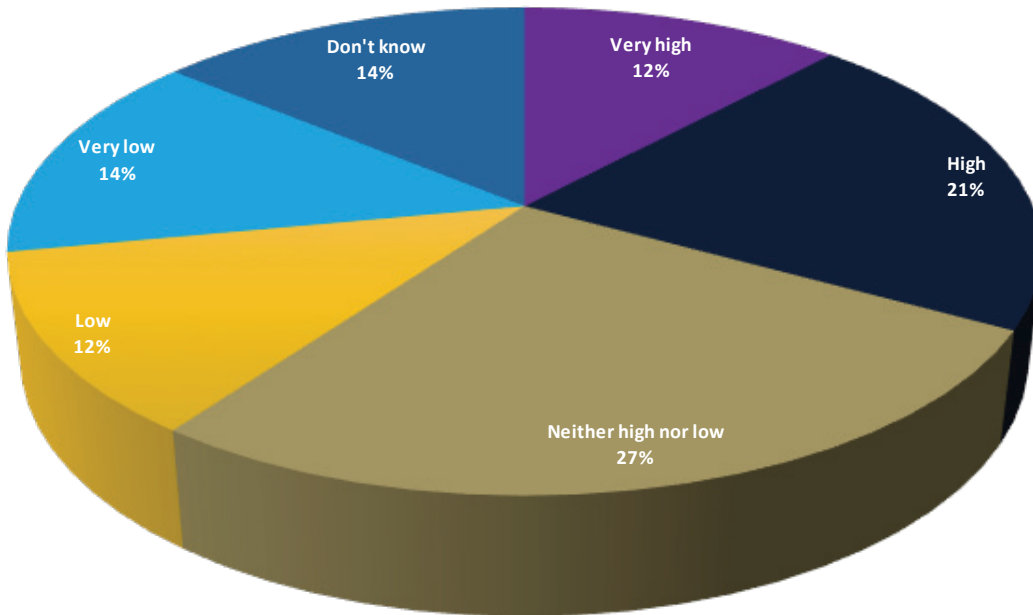
4.2.1 The UK Armed Forces during the Troubles

The first question in the survey asked about public attitudes towards the actions of the UK Armed Forces in NI during the Troubles. Using a scale ranging from *Very low* to *Very high*, respondents were asked to

provide their opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. Overall, a total of 33% had a high or a very high opinion and 26% had a low or a very low opinion, with the rest being in between or not having an opinion (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Public opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles in NI

Looking back at the past and ‘the Troubles’ in NI, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?



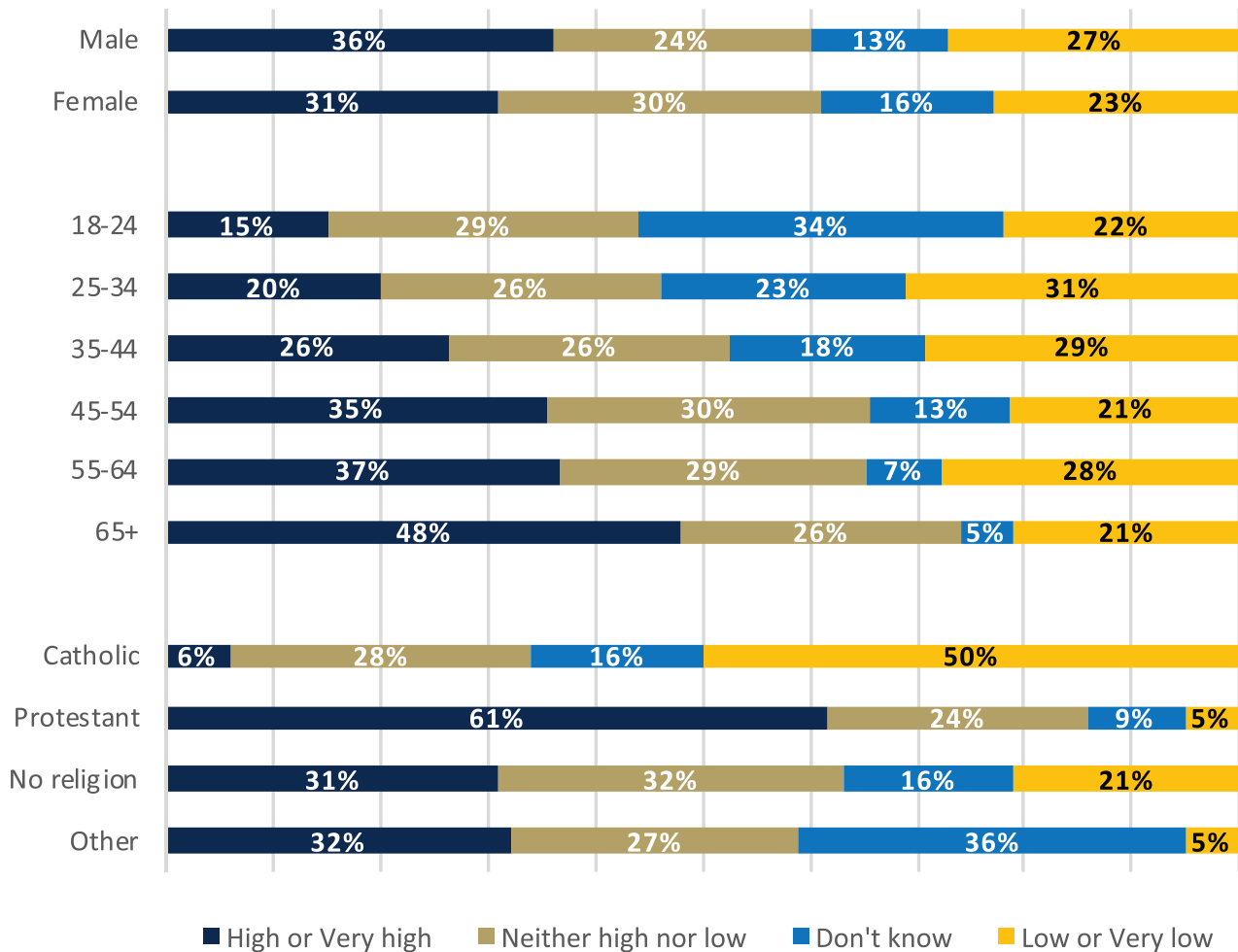
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Further analyses revealed that differences of opinion were minimal across genders, with only a slightly greater proportion of males (36%) having a high or a very high opinion compared to females (31%). Differences in opinions by age were also revealed (Figure 4.2), with the rate of high or very high opinions increasing with each age category from 15% in the 18-24 year olds to 48% in those aged 65+. However, quite a few respondents in the younger age groups indicated that they did not know what their opinion was, or they had a neutral opinion. Conversely, a greater proportion of the younger respondents had negative (i.e., low or very low) rather than positive (high or very high) opinions. The most positive opinions were revealed among those aged 65+.

Additionally, the opinions were divided based on respondents’ religion, with only 6% of respondents who identified as Catholic having a high or a very high opinion, compared to 61% of those who identified as Protestant (Figure 4.2). Further analyses revealed that respondents’ opinions were related to whether or not they or their family had connections with the Armed Forces. Specifically, Catholics were more likely to have high (as opposed to low) opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles, if they had more connections with the Armed Forces. Whether or not Protestants had any connections to the Armed Forces made no difference to their opinions, as these were generally high.

Figure 4.2: Demographic differences in public opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles in NI

Looking back at the past and ‘the Troubles’ in NI, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?

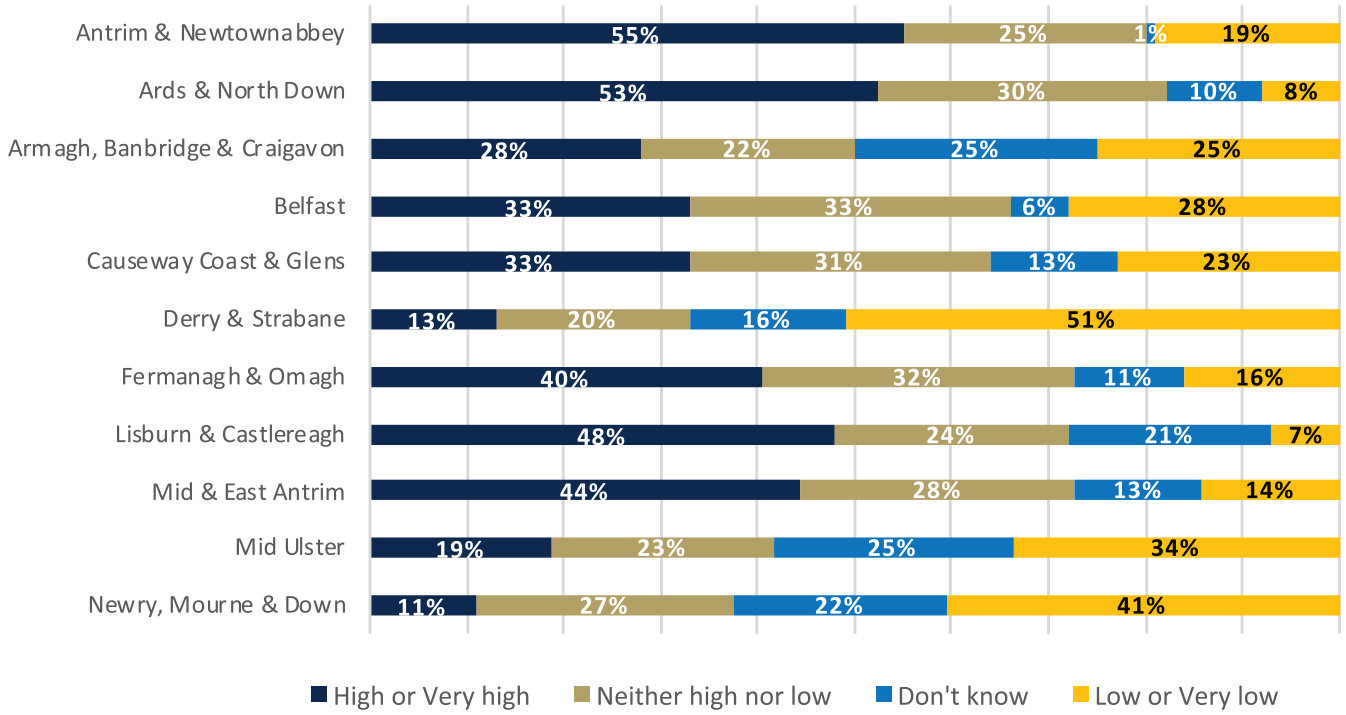


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Large variations in opinions were also revealed across different geographical areas of NI (Figure 4.3). More than half of those living in the Antrim and Newtownabbey (55%), and Ards and North Down (53%) areas had high or very high opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. In contrast, more than half of those living in Derry and Strabane area (51%) had low or very low opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. A great proportion of low or very low opinions was also reported by respondents in Newry, Mourne and Down (41%) and in Mid Ulster (34%) areas.

Figure 4.3: Geographical differences in opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles

Looking back at the past and ‘the Troubles’ in NI, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?



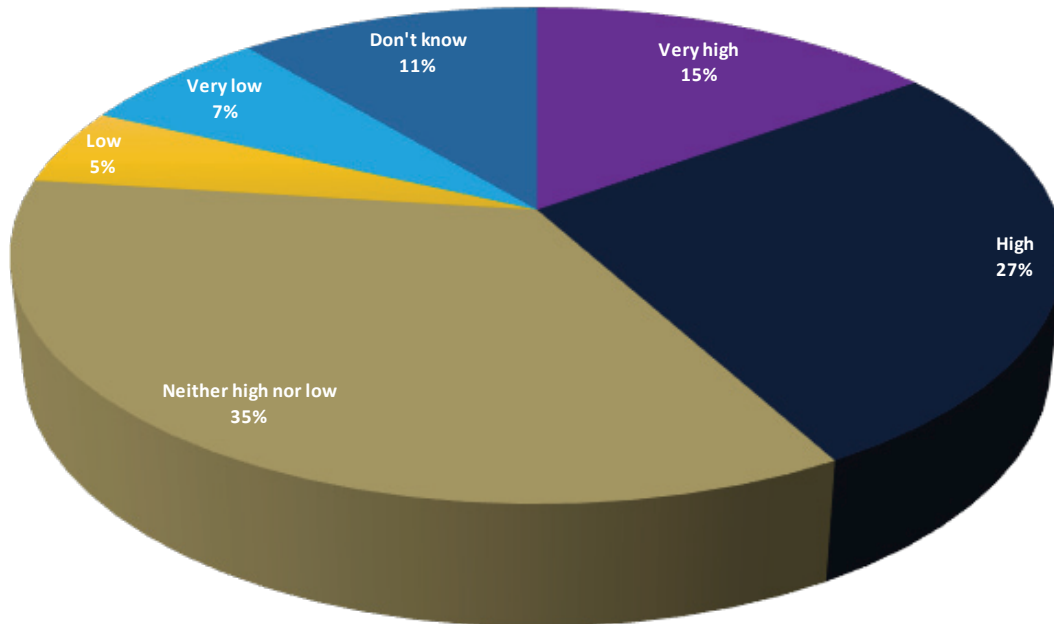
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.2 The UK Armed Forces today

The second question in the survey asked about public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces today (i.e. in 2017). Using a scale ranging from *Very low* to *Very high*, a total of 42% of respondents had a high or a very high opinion, 12% had a low or a very low opinion, and the remaining 46% were in between or they did not know (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Public opinions towards the UK Armed Forces in 2017

Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?

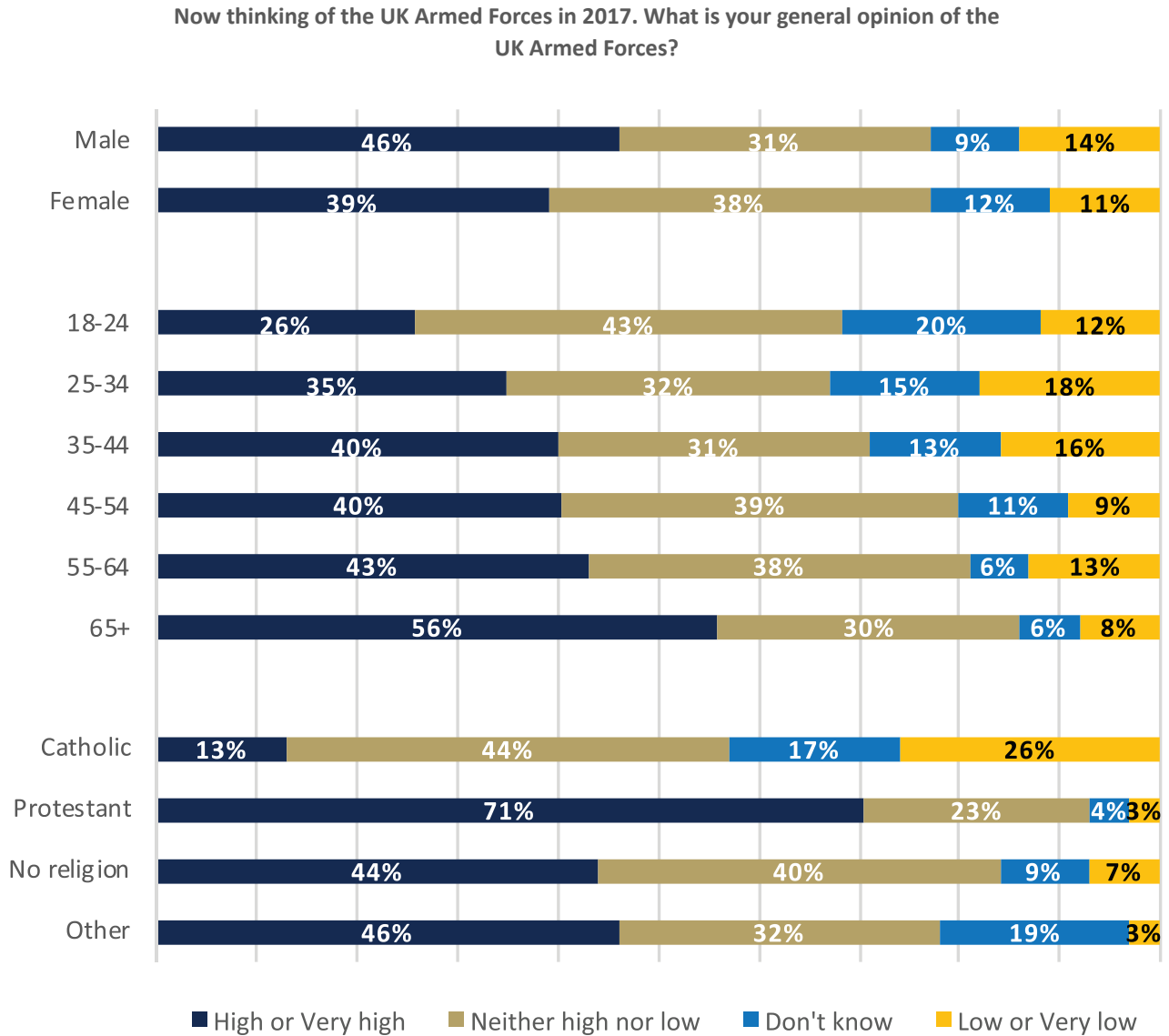


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

A slightly greater proportion of males (46%) than females (39%) reported high or very high opinions (Figure 4.3). Numerous age differences were also revealed. A smaller proportion of respondents in the younger age categories had a high or a very high opinion of the UK Armed Forces today. However, especially in the youngest age category (18-24), a substantial proportion of respondents had neutral or no opinions (63%). Individuals in the oldest age category (65+) had the highest proportion of positive opinions (Figure 4.5).

There were also large religious differences in opinions, with only 13% of Catholics, but 71% of Protestants having a high or a very high opinion of the Armed Forces today (Figure 4.5). Catholics with more family connections to the Armed Forces were more likely to have high than low opinions, whereas for Protestants, family connections did not make a difference to their opinions.

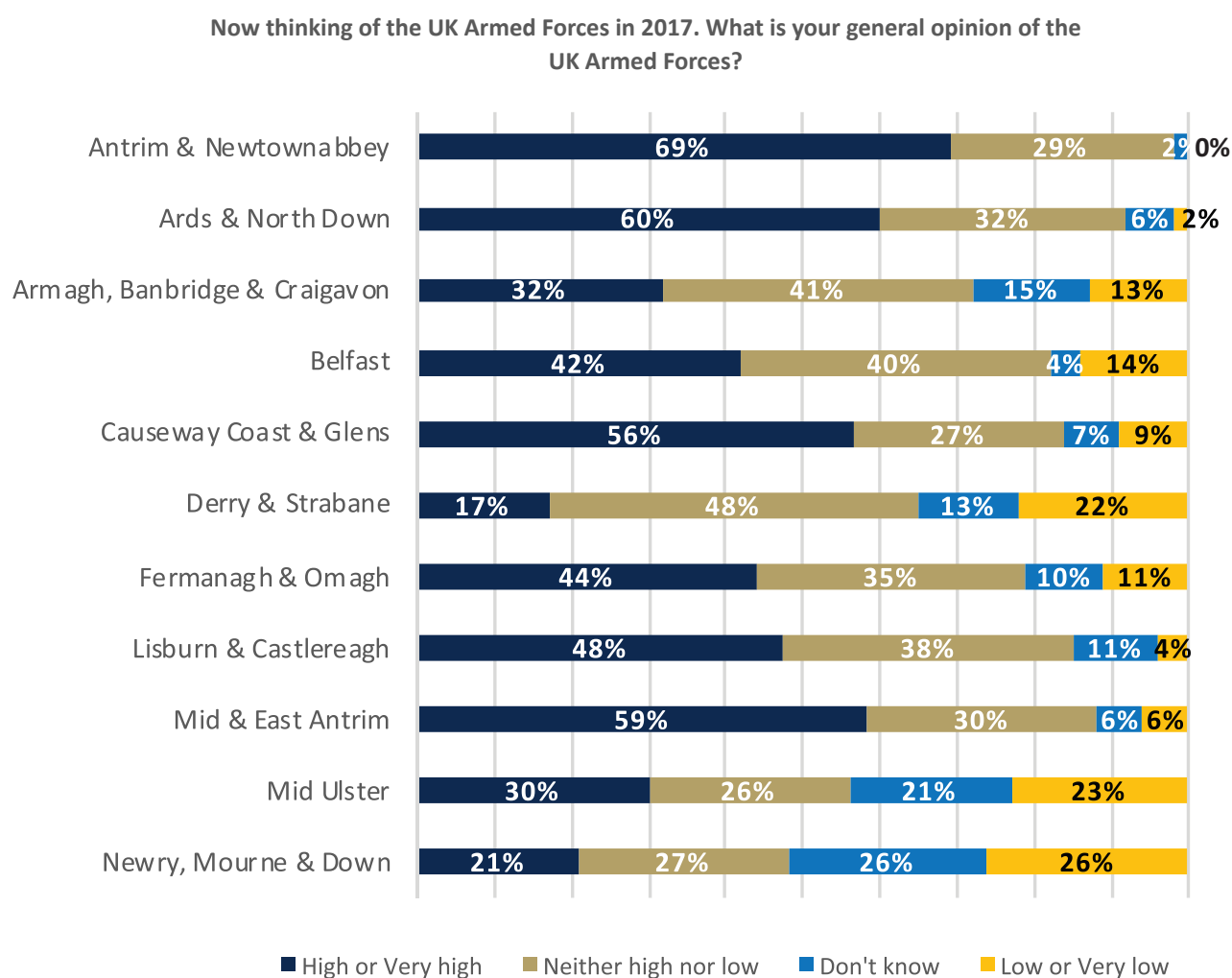
Figure 4.5: Demographic differences in opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today were also divided based on geographical location (Figure 4.6). Antrim and Newtownabbey had the highest rates of positive (i.e. high or very high) opinions (69%) towards the Armed Forces today and interestingly, 0% of respondents living in this area had low or very low opinions. Over half of the respondents in Ards and North Down (60%), Mid and East Antrim (59%), and Causeway Coast and Glens (56%) also had high or very high opinions. Concerning low or very low opinions, the highest rates were reported in Newry, Mourne and Down (26%), followed by Mid Ulster (23%) and Derry and Strabane (22%) areas.

Figure 4.6: Geographical differences in opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today.



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.3 Comparisons of public opinions to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current times

Table 4.1 below shows the differences in public opinions towards the actions of the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and towards the UK Armed Forces in 2017.

Table 4.1: Comparison of public opinions to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current time

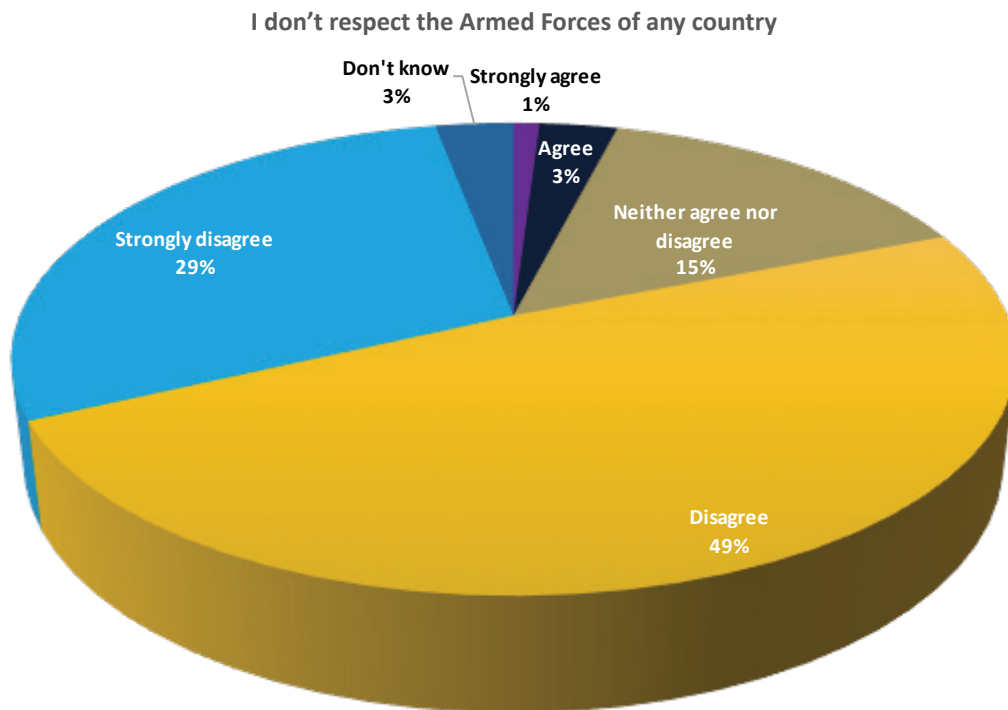
	During the Troubles	In 2017
Very high	12%	15%
High	21%	27%
Neither high nor low	27%	35%
Low	12%	5%
Very low	14%	7%
Don't know	14%	11%

Note. Percentage of the population with each specific opinion. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer.

4.2.4 Respect for Armed Forces personnel

Respondents were also presented with a statement related to their respect for the Armed Forces of any country, and a statement related to their feelings about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI relative to those who fought in other conflicts. They were asked to rate these statements on a scale ranging from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*. The majority of respondents (78%) indicated that in general they do respect the Armed Forces (Figure 4.7). Only 4% indicated that they do not respect them.

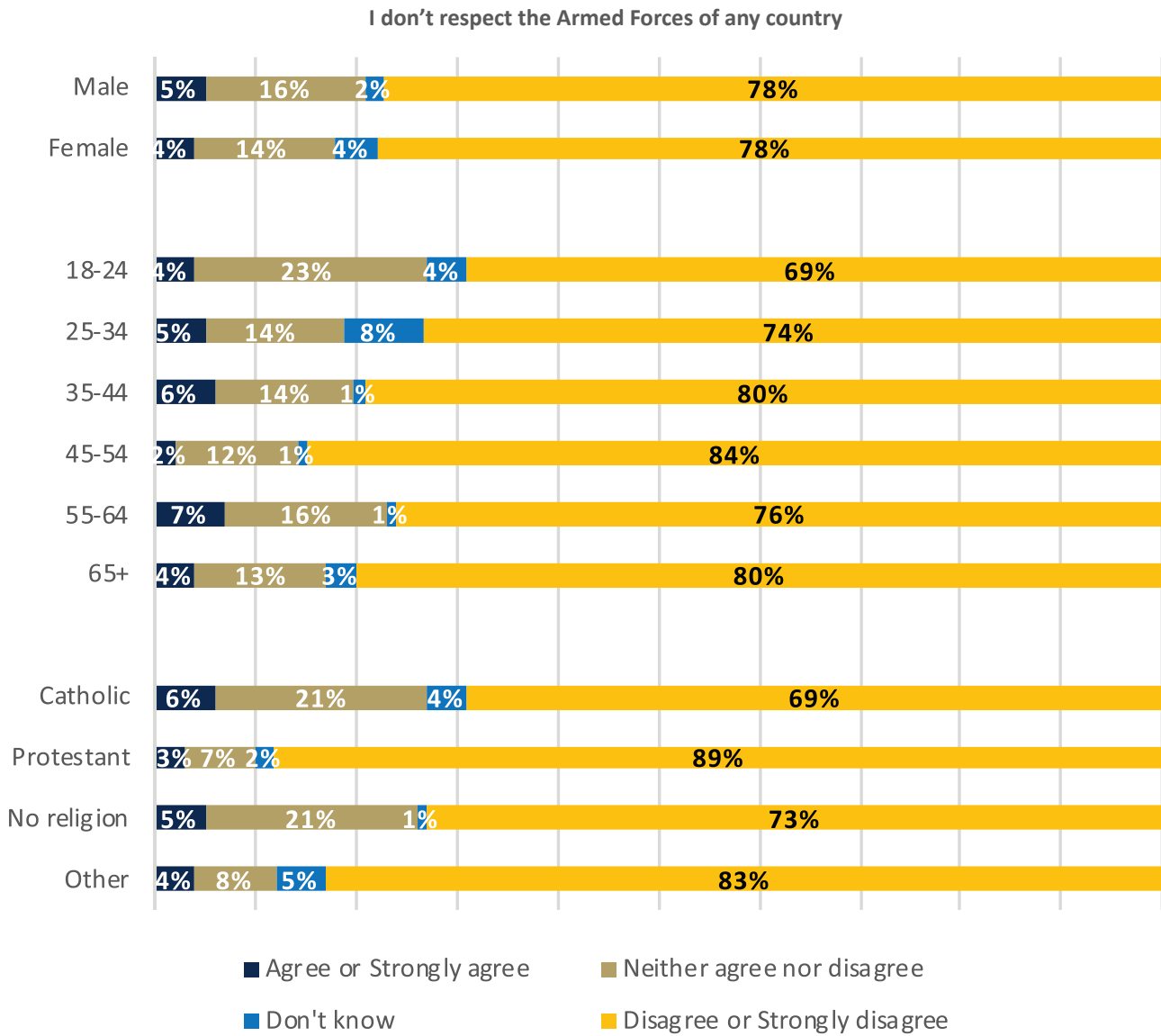
Figure 4.7: Respect for the Armed Forces of any country



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

As shown in Figure 4.8, there were no major differences between males and females in their respect for the Armed Forces of any country. In terms of age differences, the highest proportion of participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'I don't respect the Armed Forces of any country', was found in the 45-54 age group (84%), while the smallest, although still quite high, proportion of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement was found in the 18-24 age group (69%). There were also some religious differences: 89% of Protestants versus the lower percentage of 69% of Catholics disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 4.8: Demographic differences in the respect for the Armed Forces of any country

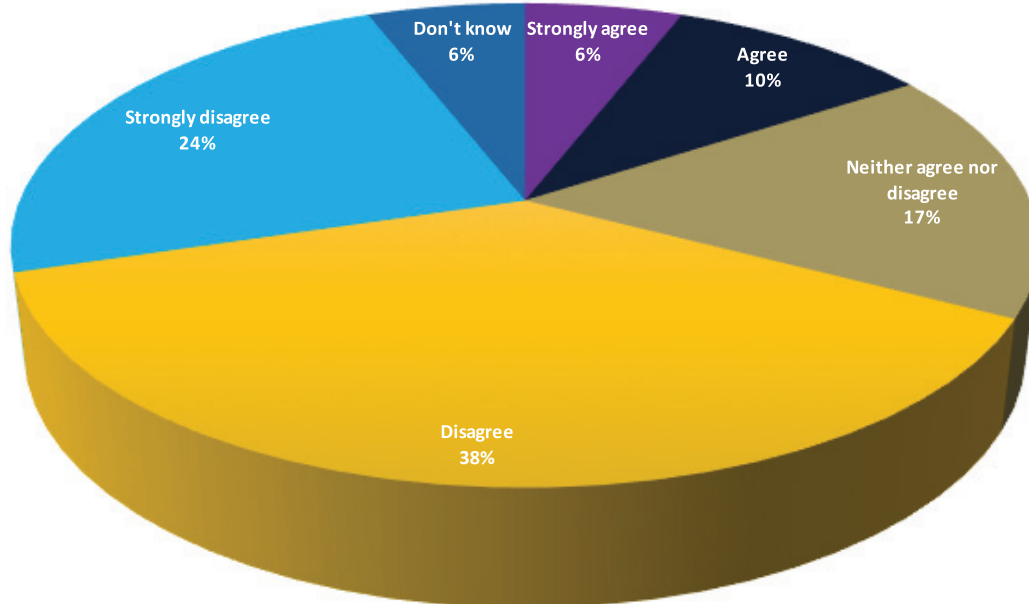


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

In relation to the second statement 'I feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than I do about those who fought in other conflicts', a total of 62% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with it, whereas 16% agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9 Feelings towards members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI versus those who fought in other conflicts

I feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than I do about those who fought in other conflicts



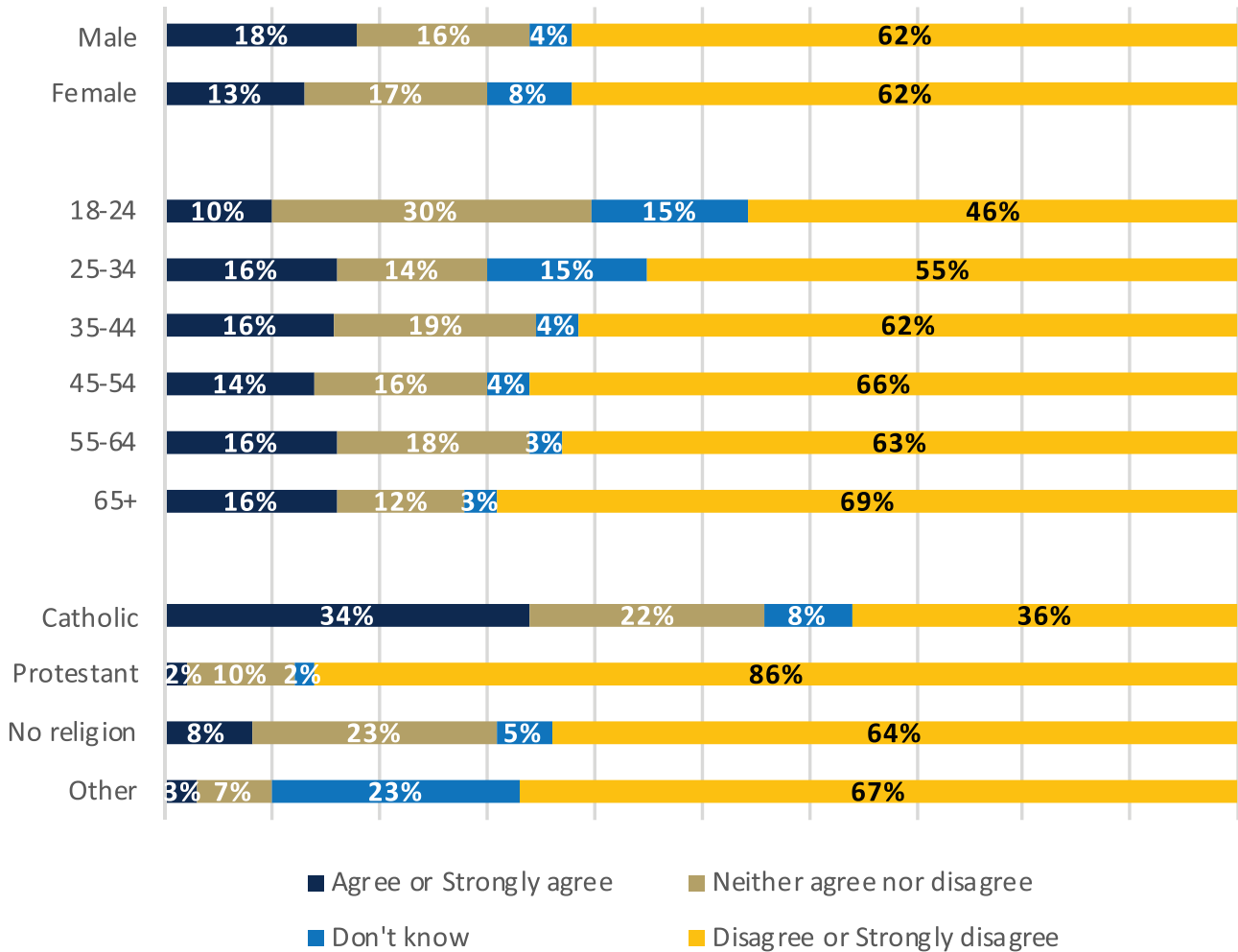
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

There were no gender differences in the proportion of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (Figure 4.10), but a slightly greater proportion of males (18%) than females (13%) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than those who fought elsewhere. In terms of age differences, again, smaller proportions of the younger age groups disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (46% of 18-24 year olds, 55% of 25-34 year olds) compared to the older age groups (69% of the 65+ year olds).

There were larger religious differences, however, with only 36% of Catholics indicating that they do not feel more negatively about those members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than those who fought elsewhere, contrasted against 86% of Protestants. On the other end of the spectrum, 34% of Catholics indicated that they do indeed feel more negatively about the members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI, whereas only 2% of Protestants shared this view. Further analyses revealed that Catholics with more family connections with the Armed Forces were less likely to feel negatively about those who served in NI than to those who served elsewhere, whereas Protestants' opinions were not affected by whether or not they had any family connections with the Armed Forces.

Figure 4.10: Demographic differences in the feelings towards members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI versus those who fought in other conflicts

I feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than I do about those who fought in other conflicts



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.5 Associations with Armed Forces personnel

Figure 4.11 shows respondents' answers to three questions asking them how comfortable/uncomfortable they would feel if someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to them, married their close relative, and if someone in their family joined the UK Armed Forces. The majority of respondents indicated that they would feel comfortable or very comfortable in all three scenarios (Moved next door: 70%; Married close relative: 70%; Family member joined: 63%).

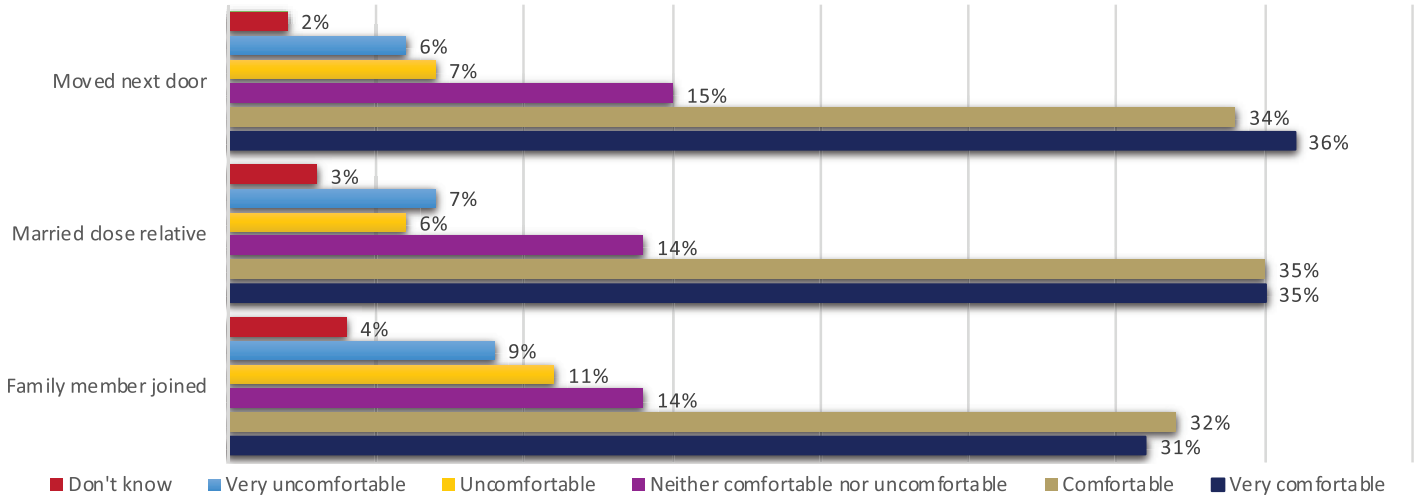
Figure 4.11: Associations with the Armed Forces

How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be if...

...Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to you?

...Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces married a close relative of yours?

...Someone in your family joined the UK Armed Forces?



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Demographic breakdown of responses to the above three questions is presented in Figures 4.12-4.14 below. In relation to someone from the Armed Forces moving next door to the respondents, there were almost no gender differences in responses, but some age differences were revealed, such that the rates of being comfortable or very comfortable with such a situation increased with age from 47% in the 18-24 year olds to 82% in the 65+ year olds. Religious differences were also revealed: only 50% of Catholics would be comfortable or very comfortable with the situation, compared to 92% of Protestants. Additionally, 30% of Catholics indicated that they would be uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with the situation, compared to only 1% of Protestants.