Ministry
of Justice

Official Statistics

Ex-service personnel in the prison population, England and Wales

Prison population as at 30 June 2022

Since January 2015, as part of the Basic Custody Screening (BCS) interview, individuals entering custody have been asked whether they had previously served in the armed services[1], and these responses have been recorded.

These data have been matched to the prison population data to produce an estimate of the number (and percentage) of ex-service personnel in the England & Wales prison population.

Matched sample details

Of the prison population as at 30 June 2022:

- **13.7%** were first received prior to 01 January 2015 (and so would not have been asked the ex-service personnel BCS question when they entered custody)
- Of the remaining 86.3% who were received on, or after, 01 January 2015 we have a matched YES / NO response for **71.3%** (the "**match rate**").

When the above two points are taken together, we have a matched YES / NO response for 49,610 **(61.5%)** of the total prison population as at 30 June 2022 (the "**coverage**").

Estimate of ex-service personnel in the prison population

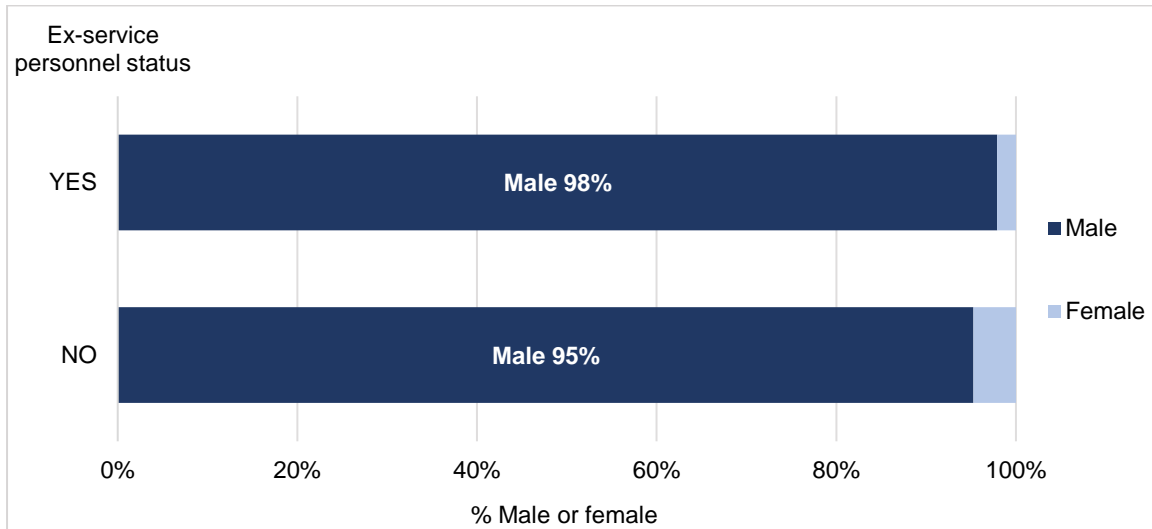|	
An estimated 3.6% were ex-service personnel	Of the 49,610 (61.5%) "coverage" in the prison population as at 30 June 2022, 1,768 (3.6%) had indicated they were ex-service personnel.

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[1] **"Have [you] been a member of the armed services?"** – the wording of the question captures those who reported serving in any armed service organisation around the world, not just those serving in the UK Armed Forces. It also captures those who had served as either a regular or reserve member. As such the estimates presented here are expected to be higher than previous estimation exercises that have just focused on those having served in the UK regular Armed Forces.

Demographics

Sex

There is a higher proportion of males (98%) in the ex-service personnel cohort, than the non ex-service personnel cohort (95%).
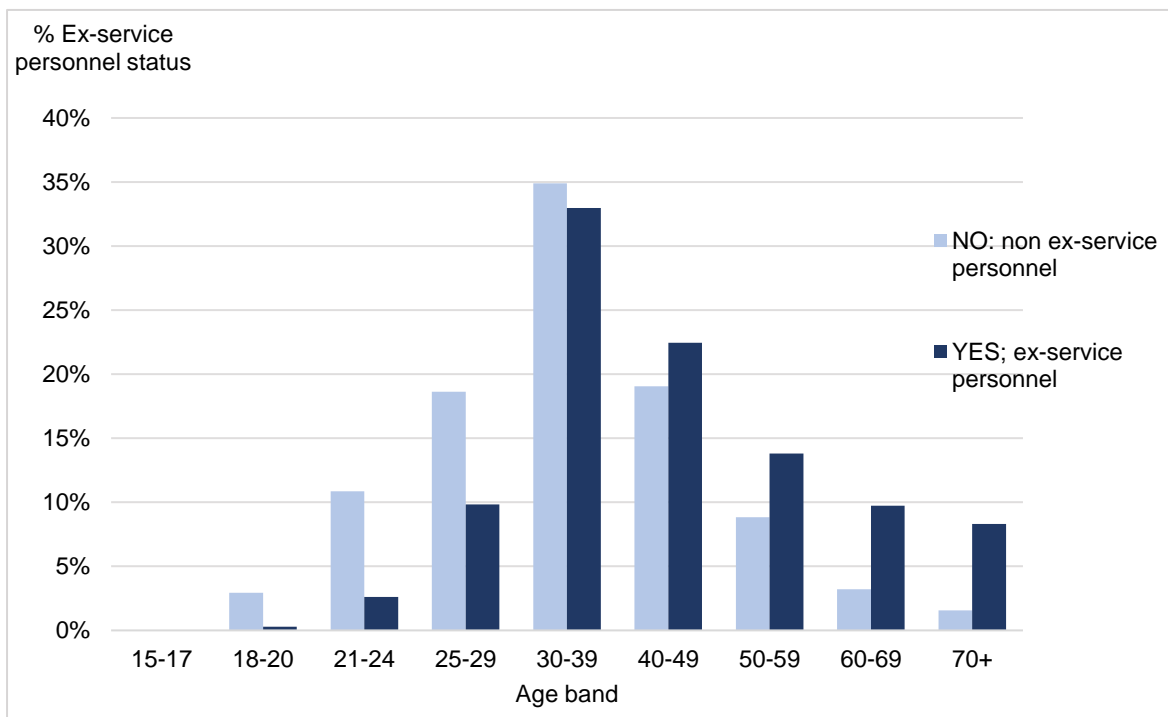
Figure 1: Matched prison population, by ex-service personnel status and sex

Age

Those in the ex-service personnel cohort (mean age 45 years) are on average nine years older than those in the non ex-service personnel cohort (mean age 36 years). The chart below shows the age distribution for both groups.

Figure 2: Matched prison population, by ex-service personnel status and age group

National Service

The observed age difference is likely due in part to National Service. Those born before 01 October 1939 would have been in the eligible cohort for National Service in the UK (this equates to those aged 82 or over as at 30 June 2022).

- 2.7% of the ex-service personnel prison population group as at 30 June 2022 were born before 01 October 1939.
- This compares to just 0.1% of the non ex-service personnel group.

Nationality

The wording of the interview question (see *Footnote 1; Page 1*) does not tell us whether an individual served in the UK Armed Forces, however we are able to use self-declared prisoner nationality as a potential proxy for this.

Figure 3: Matched ex-service personnel in the prison population, by nationality group

Total matched ex-service personnel in prison population	**1,768**
Of which:	
Nationality Group	
British National	1,627
Foreign National	139
Nationality Not Recorded	2

A clear limitation to this approach is that foreign nationals can serve in the UK Armed Forces, and British nationals may serve in a non-UK armed organisation.

Just considering British Nationals, 1,627 out of the 49,610 total matched prison population as at 30 June 2022 were British national ex-service personnel, which represents **3.3%** of the matched prison population.

This is similar to the estimate of **3.5%** from the joint Ministry of Defence & Ministry of Justice study, conducted in 2010 [2], which included those who had served in the UK regular Armed Forces.
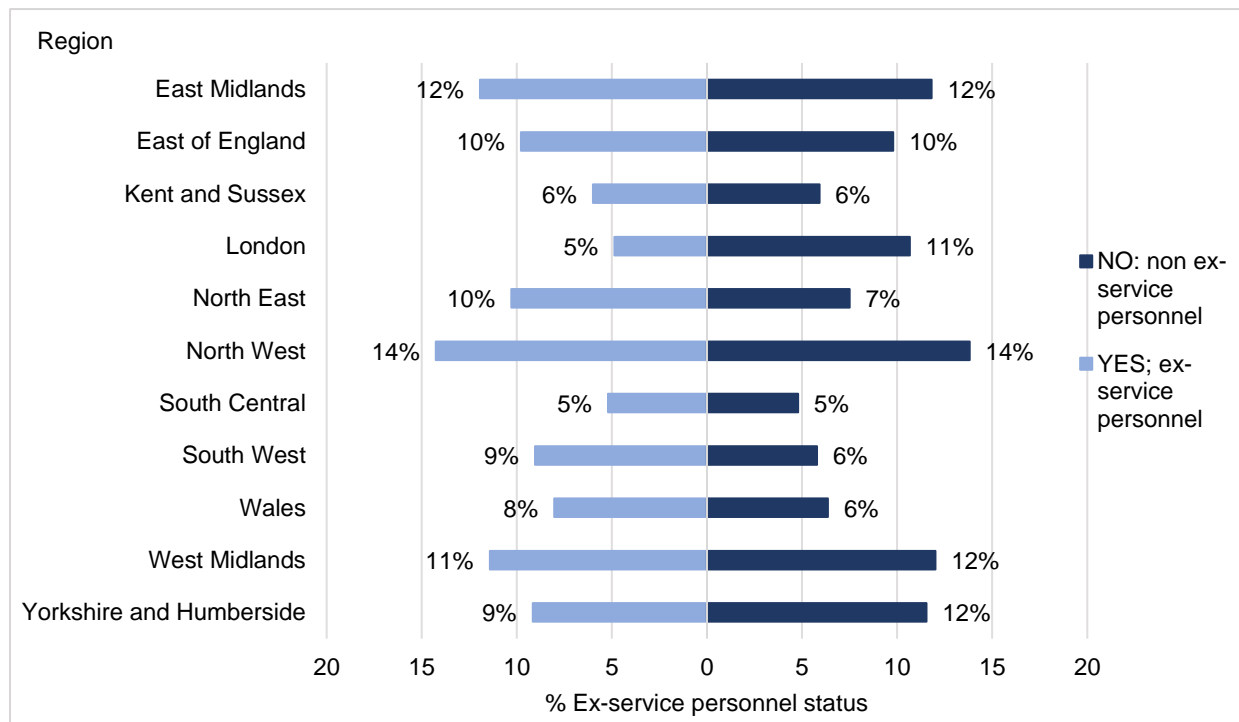
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[2] 'Ex-armed forces prisoners in England and Wales: 15 September 2010'; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ex-armed-forces-prisoners-in-england-and-wales-statistics-2010

Prison region

The ex-service personnel prison population is distributed across prisons in England and Wales. However, there is a difference in the distribution of ex-service personnel across the regions. The regions with the largest differences were London (5% of ex-service personnel and 11% of non ex-service personnel) and the South West (9% of ex-service personnel and 6% of non ex-service personnel). The larger representation of ex-service prisoners in the South West prisons may reflect veterans living close to large military locations (for example, the Devonport Naval Base and the Ministry of Defence Equipment & Support Headquarters are both in this area).

While across the whole prison estate, 3.6% of prisoners declare themselves to be ex-service personnel, some prisons have significantly more. The Verne, Haverigg, and Usk prisons have the highest proportion of ex-service personnel (12.1%, 11%, and 10.4% respectively). This may reflect the specific functions of these prisons. More information can be found on their prison information pages[3].

Figure 4: Matched prison population, by the percentage of ex-service personnel in each prison region

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales

Contact

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