



With many military families living in Service Family Accommodation either at or close to their place of work, they can form close friendships and networks with other serving families. Isolation following the loss of a spouse can be particularly prevalent for those in these communities.

There are almost 15,000 war widows and widowers in the UK today and this study will inform national debate and lead to the development of policy recommendations and guidance for improved service provision.

The funding was awarded to Northumbria due to the University's extensive experience of working to improve the health and wellbeing of veterans and their families. The University is home to [The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research](#) – a collective of academics, service providers and service users working to understand the complexities that veterans and their families experience.

[Dr Gemma Wilson](#) is a Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow in Applied Health and is leading the project at Northumbria University. She explained: "Internationally, loneliness and social isolation are now recognised as being linked to poor physical health and well-being, and there is growing understanding of these issues being related to both widowhood and the Armed Forces Community. However, there is currently a lack of evidence specifically examining social isolation and loneliness in the war widows' population, including those in the UK.

"This project aims to explore the experiences of social isolation and loneliness and understand services targeting war widows' social participation. We are thrilled to be working with Forces in Mind Trust and partnering with the War Widows Association on this project."

Ray Lock, Chief Executive at the Forces in Mind Trust said that social isolation and loneliness can have a significant impact on a person's health and wellbeing, and that the issue is more pressing today than ever before.

"Military life brings unique challenges," he said. "Service personnel and their families often face multiple moves and, when they leave the Armed Forces, they can also leave behind a very close network. This can make people more vulnerable to isolation. Losing a spouse through service makes it even harder. This research is therefore both relevant and timely and will provide us with the necessary insights to produce a powerful set of recommendations that

will improve the support for our war widows and widowers.”

Mary Moreland is Chairman of the War Widows' Association, which is working in collaboration with Northumbria University on the study. She said: “The membership of the War Widows' Association covers all three services, the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force, irrespective of age, rank or service of the deceased.

“When there is no longer a serving person in the family unit those left behind are very frequently forgotten. Bereavement can add to increased feelings of isolation and loneliness, however as war widows no longer belong to the armed forces community, these feeling may be magnified.

“On behalf of the Association I am delighted to be working in collaboration with Northumbria University and Forces in Mind Trust on this project. It is a very exciting opportunity to build an evidence base from research on an extremely relevant topic and on a group where little research has been completed.”

The Forces in Mind Trust's mission is to enable ex-Service personnel and their families to make a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life. It delivers this mission by generating an evidence base that influences and underpins policy making and service delivery.

The project, whose start has been delayed by COVID-19, is due to begin in September 2020. It was awarded under FiMT's Health Programme and is expected to last two years.

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