

## Supporting Psychosocial Adjustment in Serving Personnel and Veterans with Appearance-Altering Injuries

### A guide for health professionals

## Who?



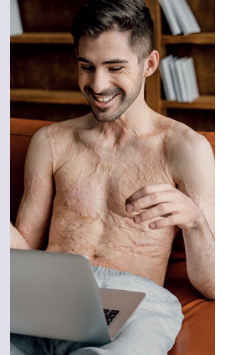
Between 2005–2020

**10,100** UK **service personnel and veterans** in receipt of Armed Forces Compensation due to 'injury, wounds, and scarring'

**336** Traumatic or surgical amputations of one or more limbs

## Appearance-Altering Injuries (AAIs) are:

- Varied in type, size, location
- May include scarring from shrapnel, burns, gunshot wounds, limb-loss, loss of digits, loss of eyes, ears, and other body parts and the use of mobility aids
- Including, among some men, genital injuries of varying severity (e.g. perineum scarring to loss of testicles, partial or full loss of penis)



## What?

The **UNITS Study**

The Understanding Needs and Interventions for the Treatment of Scarring (UNITS): The Psychosocial impact of conflict related disfigurement, study:

Interviewed military populations with AAIs:



**20**

Veterans

**3**

Serving Personnel

Conducted an online survey comparing experiences of AAIs:



**121**

Veterans

**193**

Civilians

## Research findings

Military populations with AAI may be at risk of:

- **Low body esteem**
- **Intrusive public attention**
- **Social anxiety**
- **Symptoms of depression**
- **Reduced engagement in normal life activities**



**Some veterans and serving personnel with AAIs reported limited opportunities to talk about how they feel about their changed appearance, but many would like support**

Protective factors may include:

- **Body image flexibility:** the capacity to pursue meaning and value in your life, to do things that are important to you, while at the same time experiencing difficult thoughts/feelings about the body
- **Self-compassion**
- **Peer support from others with AAIs**
- **Managing questions and reactions of others**
- **Meaningful activities**
- **Purposeful pursuits**

## How can you help?

- ▶ Acknowledge, normalise & validate appearance-related challenges
- ▶ Provide opportunities to talk about concerns
- ▶ Direct to available support for civilians with AAIs, e.g. [www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

### Coming soon! New veteran support from the UNITS Team

- ▶ Training for anyone supporting serving personnel and veterans with AAI
- ▶ Evidence-based interventions to validate, teach skills to manage difficult social situations, and provide psychological support
- ▶ For more information on upcoming resources contact [car@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:car@uwe.ac.uk)

