

Anonymous Written evidence submission¹

The Army do a lot of things right to make you both a better person and a capable person to handle situations.

Like all round defence to turn on your senses and keep you alive, but they don't teach you how to turn this off, I mention this because after ten years of hyper vigilance and hyper- sensitivity my body is exhausted. I have found this act of remembering in order to write this email harrowing reliving all the cascades of emotions somethings are still blocked out.

What stressed me while being in [...] conflict zones, having trained as a nurse I was prepared for trauma and dead bodies, but nothing prepared me in my 20 years of training for the mental stressors. I will attempt to show the escalation patterns 1-10 scale 1 being normal 9 being suicidal and 10 being homicidal, now that I can reflect on the past [...] years after this situation, remember different things affect different people in different ways.

After serving in [...] in such a controlled environment I didn't understand the pressures and behaviours I experienced after leaving that environment. If the Army had told me what to expect I might of handle things better. After Being discharged on the Tuesday [...] and back in civil street on the Wednesday, although I was happy to be home I didn't understand what I was feeling, so when I met my young son he was in defiance mode, (acting out) because I had left him and the clash between us was so very out of charter for me that I am ashamed to admit that the incident resulted in getting the police involved. Considering up until that point, I had never smacked my child (when it was socially acceptable to do so) but that was the first time in my life that I had ever felt RAGE like that in my life the whole red mist over my eyes and steam coming out of my Ears. My son may have forgiven me, but I still carry the guilt. During this time I attended a regimental dinner at [...] and yes I did display high jinx during that dinner something out of charter for me, which the Army then wanted to punish me for instead of seeing that it was acting behaviour and required support and therapy not punishment. So I would say that I was at a level four on the stressed scale at that point.

Within a short space of time I was called up under Queens orders to go to Iraq. Once there in Iraq nobody could tell me/us when we would be going home, so psychologically this put me under pressure. I could not tell the family anything for definite, so stress level when up to a five (even if the Army had said you are here for six months it would have been kinder).

¹ Minor details removed to protect contributor's identity. These are marked with "[...]"

I was totally stressed that we had gone into a chemical biological conflict zone with a possible death on a par with Chernobyl and on the day before the official started of the conflict, protection we the TA were being asked to hand fill sand bags to build scrapes to hide under from an air attack, since all the Volvos where being used for other locations. That our lives had no value or less value than the regular soldiers and before you think that's not what happened. I was given a LT [...] to work with us and she would come out with comments like " I have been told to keep them working a full 12 hr shift " and "we (the regular Army) have to get our money's worth out of them (the TA)" like our lives have less value than theirs this was the culture then. Why else would they ask us to pay for our own life insurance with an American company, I think it was called (Atax). when any modern work place includes this in the salary package! For any high risk job, stress level six

During my time I felt like that being a woman was an inconvenience to the Army, why because no consideration was given to my needs the toilets were an open pit/seat and the sand flies that were attracted by the smell of blood would jump out and bite my ladies parts, so badly that I got cream, but because I couldn't reach the bites I had to resort to ask a male college to help with this situation which was both embracing and degraded, there was no other females [...] The toilets in the set up camp had no washing facilities close by see the picture and wether you use pads or tampons you still get bodily fluid on your hands this was before the days of wet wipes. Secondly if the Army had considered my normal attributes and not treated me like a problem not to be discussed, they could have offered us ladies subcutaneous implants or to go on the pill and then just take them back to back so we didn't have to have a sand filled crotch or flys following me around or the smell of mensuration blood due to the heat for six months of the tour of duty. I was reduced to trying to hide any accidents at night, since there was no privacy to change the method of mensuration capture, feeling grubby/dirty in that hot sweaty climate day and night. Women who have had children have a greater mensuration flow, so this was a big deal since I didn't want to end up with an infection because I wanted to try for another child. Twice I caught D&V diarrhoea and vomiting and was admitted to the field hospital during my tour this is on top of taking the NAP tablets and being ill from the anthrax because I had only just got over a sore throat Stress level seven.

When we finally got in to a routine and access to the satellite phones. I was allocated a slot, however by the time all [...] of us had access to a land rover and got to the location to use it. I was last in the queue if only they had allowed the correct allocation of time for everybody, I would have had access to a call home, instead I did not get that opportunity to use the sat phones on

that day and was duly told off for being late to the o group and I mention this because this one act of poor planning that stop me knowing that my [...] [relative] was on his deathbed that day and I could have flown back in time to say my good byes instead I had to use the phone the next day and sadly by that time he was dead, this caused me much stress that I wasn't there to hold his hand, since he loved me and was proud of me, having being a retired [...] officer. That was the first time I had cried/sobbed my heart out in years, the grief of bereavement stress level eight.

Twice we were bump from a seat on the plane home after telling our families we would be back at a specific time and date, after arriving home and signing back to TA/reservists we were given a weekend reunion at [...], but to think amongst the soldiers that I served with shoulder to shoulder there was a sexual predator that came premeditated with the date rape drug rohipnal and spiked my drink!! Which is a criminal offence. At the time I was glad that my old behaviour of self preservation kicked and I left the evening/party on my own as usual, but waking up the next morning I could feel that I had lost a huge chunk of time, so I checked to see if I had forced sex which I did not. I was very disturbed and did not know at that time this is what happened to me (date rape was only just beginning to be in the news) that was the final straw for me stress level ten.

so I did not sign up for another three years with theTA due to the lack of respect for me just being a woman.

After ten years of internal anger I finally had 16 weeks CBT to deal with this anger triggers that the stress of my time in the Army left me with ie not being able to relax and fall asleep on my own couch for over ten years. That my body internalised the stresses and chemical cocktail that was given to me. This cause me to go through early menopause [...]. That I was robbed of another child all the associated heart ache, tears that caused me to pushed away my partner and other relationships, because I no longer felt womanly all the mental anguish and hot sweats followed by mood swings. I was hard to live with the doctors could not give me HRT due to the high blood pressure brought on by the stress hormones levels. I didn't feel like me the jest for life had gone. My self respect and motivation for enjoying being a woman just dead inside.

I tried to go back to work but was sacked on [...] [multiple] separate occasions because my passion for keeping people safe was perceived as aggression (health and safety officer) because the workplace wasn't ready for a plain speaking woman that the Army had taught me to be ie holding my own in stressful situations.

During the intervening years, I have contemplated suicide on several occasions since my previous large than life existence is now I micro life, reduced to living on benefits, in a prison of a flat without the prospects of a decent home, or a loving relationship, what is left for me? Self medication! all my dream and aspirations gone down the drain. Between the disturbed sleep- flash backs and the arthritis my body has aged on the inside before it's time on top of the mental disassociation from life.

After 20 years service both reserve and regular there is no workplace pension available for me, and in my opinion nor is a level playing field when it comes to the bench mark for compensation either! Below is the ground for rejection and my grounds that I feel I have lost out on in life just for doing my job and not having a husband.

I have appealed the rejection decision on the following grounds. Stress on the female body leading to early menopause when coupled with the cocktail of medication received ie anthrax, both in field hospital when doing back to back tours in conflict zones. The loss of family life the breakdown of relationships I.e. family and friends along with community standing (physically punishing my child in stress attack) the loss of dignity for example sleeping arrangements no privacy undressing while [...] on a tour of duty. Loss of work due to being sacked [...] [multiple] times resulting from behaviour issue PTSD from the conflict zones. The loss of career progression and financial security for my future. Loss of a mortgage opportunity to own my own home and use this as my contribution toward nursing care home costs in my old age. The loss of national security contribution due to not coping with the claiming procedures while still in the Army mind set of not wanting to be a scrounged or malignant hiding the shame of being unemployed I'll prepared to admit that I needed help after being an over achiever, before universal credit went on line.

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