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Developing a nationwide dataset of UK veterans seeking help from sector charities

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Background: The assistance to military veterans and their families in the UK is provided by both the NHS and over 1800 military charities. These charities count services using different definitions and reporting systems, so to date a national registry of service usage does not exist. The aim of the MONARCH study is to build a standardised registry of service usage data for the military charity sector, in order to identify patterns of use, gain insight on possible risk factors, and guide the allocation of resources.

Methods: Data is anonymised and a unique identifier is generated by adopting a Secure Hashing Algorithm, allowing both privacy protection and avoiding double counts. Data is standardised, and linked with an automated process to create an aggregated dataset. The dataset describes the population, using both a-priori and machine learning approaches (K-means clustering) to unveil different usage patterns. In addition, it will be linked to an online interactive dashboard.

Results: To date 5 national charities have shared data, for a total of 42,509 veterans with 128,423 needs. The mean age of beneficiaries was 60.1 years (SD 20.5), and 90% were male. 65% were receiving some other form of statutory benefit, 5% was homeless and 1% was imprisoned. 65% of the needs recorded concerned social wellbeing. 40% of veterans were helped at least in two different years. The k-means clustering approach based on the number of accesses, number of needs and repetition of need returned 4 subgroups of use that were identical to those created using a priori knowledge.

Conclusions: The dataset is the most comprehensive source of charity usage data in the UK to date. Service usage is generally homogenous among subgroups, but some differences were highlighted indicating that younger, non-officer veterans may be more at risk of presenting with more complex needs. These first useful insights can help allocate resources to build an effective preventive strategy for more complex cases.

Key messages:

- The MONARCH dataset is the first comprehensive nationwide registry in the UK of military charity data.
- The understanding of usage patterns can lead to the design of targeted preventive strategies.