



A phenomenological study exploring the antecedent causes of criminal behaviours in veterans that have been incarcerated – through the tripartite filter of education.

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Abstract

It is estimated that between 3.4% and 19.1% of the current prison population comprises individuals with a military background. While these statistics are subject to ongoing debate and scrutiny, it is widely acknowledged that veterans represent a significant professional cohort within the prison system. Importantly, research indicates that veterans are not inherently more likely to engage in criminal behaviour compared to their civilian counterparts; however, they are three times more likely to be implicated in offences characterised as violent or sexual in nature. Extensive research has been conducted regarding the statistical representation of veterans within the criminal justice system as well as the mental health challenges they may encounter. Nevertheless, the present study seeks to explore this issue from a novel perspective, focusing on the role of education, encompassing both formal and informal educational experiences. It further investigates the cultural dynamics of the military and the mechanisms through which these cultural elements are transmitted among service members throughout the ranks.

The purpose of this study is to explore the causes and reasons why those individuals became involved in criminal justice experiences, through the lens of formal, informal, and non-formal education. Data was collected from 6 participants using timelines and semi-structured interviews, which were thematically analysed. The participants all identified as having served in the army and having experienced subsequent contact with the criminal justice system for various offences. IPA (Smith, Jarmon & Osborn, 1999) was used to analyse the data that was produced and social theories to contextualise it. The reasons why veterans commit crimes and the role of culture in the military. The study allowed the veterans to have a voice and express their experiences as a gap in this area of knowledge that other studies had identified.

Keywords: UK armed forces, veterans, ex-forces, criminal justice system, incarcerated, qualitative, strain theory, habitus, culture, structure.

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The study was interrupted by the COVID–19 pandemic that swept the world in 2020 and put a halt to everyday life as we know it. It is still having an impact on us now and has not gone away. I started out wanting to interview veterans in the prison settings where they were, but this is still not possible due to the risks that the pandemic poses in such confined communities. It is a testament to the resilience, determination and support of the supervisory team that I could continue with the study.

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Glossary and terms

AFC – Armed Forces Community

AFCO – Armed Forces Careers Office

ATSY – Air Transport Security (Role of the RAFP)

Bead Window – When communications have been intercepted

BZZ – Brize Norton (biggest station in the RAF)

Cannon Fodder – The Infantry

Civvy – Non-military person

Civvy Street Life – Outside of the military where civvies live

CJE – Criminal Justice Experience

CJS – Criminal Justice System

CO – Commanding Officer or Commissioned Officer

Col – Colonel

Cpl – Corporal

Check in – What the RAF do into a 5* hotel

DASA – Defence Analytical Service and Advice

Detachment – Temporary attachment to another unit

Dig in – Something the army do

DSW – Defence Welfare Service

ESL – Early Service Leader

Fast Jet – Fighter or bomber

Fast Jet Jockey – Pilot

Flt – Flight

Flt Lt – Flight Lieutenant

HMP – Her Majesty's Prison (now His Majesty)

HMPPS – Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (now His Majesty) Healthier Heroes – Burnley Charity Supporting AFC

Home Office – Government Department responsible for Police, Prisons, immigration and security

HQ or Head Shed – Head Quarters

Jankers – Disciplinary measure

Janker Waller – Somebody doing jankers / person receiving punishment

JLR – Junior Leaders Regiment

JNCO – Junior Non-Commissioned Officer (Corporal)

MoD – Ministry of Defence

MCTC – Military Correction Training Centre, Colchester (The Glasshouse) Prison for the Armed Forces

NHS – National Health Service

Op Courage – Mental Health programme for the AFC

Op Fortitude – Programme for assisting the AFC with homelessness

Op Nova – Programme for the AFC in the CJS

Paras – Parachute Regiment (glorified infantry)

PD – Personal Development or HR clerk in the RAF

Posting – A move to another base

PSF – Personnel Services Flight HR (RAF)

PVR – Premature Voluntary Release / Retirement (resign or leave)

RAF – Royal Air Force

RAMC – Royal Army Medical Corps

RAFP – Royal Air Force Police

RBL – Royal British Legion (charity supporting the AFC)

RBLI – Royal British Legion Industries

RE – Royal Engineers

RN – Royal Navy

RLC – Royal Logistics Corps (commonly known as the Really Large Corps)

RM – Royal Marines (part of the Navy but do not tell them that)

RTC – Royal Tank Corps

Regt – Regiment

SAS – Special Air Service

SBS – Special Boat Service the elite

Sgt – Sergeant

Sqn – Squadron

Sqn Ldr – Squadron Leader

Fizzer – Disciplinary charge leading to a punishment of extra duties or prison

SNCO – Senior Non-Commissioned Officer (Sergeant and Warrant Officer)

SSAFA – Soldiers, sailors, airman, Families Association

SPVA – Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (based at Norcross in Blackpool)

Sharkwatch – Somebody designated on social occasions to be alert to danger

TBI – Traumatic Brain Injury (brain injuries caused by explosions)

Tab – Something the army do

THH – Tom Harrison House Liverpool Charity supporting AFC

UKAF – United Kingdom Armed Forces

USA – United States of America

Vets HQ – Liverpool Charity supporting AFC

VICSO – Veterans in Custody Support Officer

WO – Warrant Officer

Wokka – Helicopter

Timmy or Tommy – Passenger of Freight aircraft formerly carried out by VC10 or Tristar now Voyager and C17

Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Study

The research aims.

The primary focus of this study is to understand the lived experiences of veterans with Criminal Justice Experience (CJE) through the tripartite lens of education: formal, non-formal and informal education.¹ As a doctoral project within the LJMU School of Education, one of the main aims is to understand the diverse and multifaceted role, and impact of education in the respective stories and life-journeys of the participating veterans. In addition to this, the study also integrates elements of criminology and sociology to establish a conceptual framework and to assist in the interpretation of the data gathered through timelines and semi-structured interviews. The fieldwork research contained in this study facilitated an environment where participants were given the freedom and flexibility to articulate their experiences in relation to significant events that may have contributed to pre-custodial behaviours and criminality.

This study has three key aims. The first aim is to explore the interplay between education and the Criminal Justice Experiences of the participating veterans. The second aim seeks to explore and understand educational transitions and their implications throughout the life course of the participating veterans. Finally, the third aim aspires to offer policy-related

¹ Within the context of this study, I also identify and utilise the term pre-custodial behaviours and interventions that relates to alcohol/ism, drug taking and displays of violence and possibly homelessness resulting from such behaviours which subsequently led to incarceration or the risk of incarceration. The interventions are rehabilitation treatments for alcoholism, substance abuse and other therapies such as mental health initiatives and life skill courses.

guidance and recommendations concerning educational opportunities and the development and escalation of CJE behaviours that may have been overlooked.

By investigating the lived experiences of veterans from the UK Armed Forces who have exhibited pre-custodial and criminal behaviour during the phases of pre-service, service, and post-service periods, the study considers a range of cultural and structural perspectives to explore an understanding of the factors influencing the participating veterans' behaviours.² Related to this, the rationale for employing an education-focused framework for the study is to consider the extent to which a correlation exists between educational attainment and precustodial/risk-taking or criminal behaviours. Existing literature suggests that there are indeed links between an individual's ecology – specifically, the social and spatial dynamics of their communities – and behavioural patterns within those contexts. The necessity for the focus of this research is further underscored by prominent scholars such as McManus and Wessley (2010), Fossey (2010), and Moorhead (2020), and Kwan, J., MacManus, D., & Fear, N.T. (2025) who have recommended further research exploration into this area.

The later research conducted by Kwan, MacManus, and Fear illuminates the urgent need for proactive interventions and policy reforms within military frameworks. By addressing the underlying determinants of offending behaviours at each stage of military service. As a partial response to this, the research and study conducted here serves as a critical step towards understanding the complexities of criminal behaviour in military contexts and underscores the importance of a holistic approach to prevention and rehabilitation.

This study will also explore and examine the various interventions provided to these individuals and their impact on their experiences and subsequent reintegration into society. Utilising the sociological framework of Pierre Bourdieu, the study examines the influence of social ecology

² The definitions of the different accepted forms of education are discussed later in this chapter

on individual behaviours, risk-taking practices, and leisure activities. Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, financial, and social capital are applied as vehicles for understanding how such

factors shape the habitus of individuals, ultimately leading to the manifestation of particular characteristics and behaviours. Furthermore, the study incorporates the works of Robert Merton (1910-2003) and Travis Hirschi (1935-2017) as vehicles for exploring the underlying reasons for pre-custodial/risk-taking and criminal behavioural tendencies, as well as using them to consider social deterrents that might mitigate or prevent the emergence of such actions. The theoretical perspectives provide a context for analysing the significant life and education-related events that veterans perceive as instrumental in their involvement in risktaking or criminal activities, emphasising not only formal educational experiences but also the critical role played by informal and non-formal education in the shaping of the participant and their life trajectories.

History and context: A job like no other

The military structure of the United Kingdom (UK) comprises three primary branches: the Army, the Royal Navy, and the Royal Air Force (RAF). Each branch serves distinct functions in national defence, with the Army being regarded as the principal combat component. The Army encompasses myriad roles and units, including the infantry, artillery, and mechanised brigades. They operate under a regimental system that draws upon historical and local traditions. For instance, regiments such as The Duke of Lancaster targets recruitments in the county palatine of Lancashire. The Mercians, formed from the merger of the Staffordshire and Cheshire Regiments, reflect the historical and cultural contexts of their respective regions. Additionally, Scottish, Welsh and Irish regiments signify the unique national identities which span the military framework. The Royal Navy, often referred to as the "senior service," is historically prestigious. This branch of the military includes the Royal Marines, tasked with the vital responsibility of fleet protection. Conversely, the RAF, established on April 1, 1918,

through the consolidation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service, is the newest branch of the armed forces.

In ensuring the overarching defence of the nation, the different branches of the military are interdependent. The Army is actively engaged in ground combat operations, historically serving as the primary fighting force in conflicts ranging from World War I battles in France and Belgium, to contemporary operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Royal Navy's role involves strategic projection of British power at sea and safeguarding overseas interests, as evidenced by its involvement in the Falklands War of 1982. Similarly, the RAF's objective is to achieve air supremacy, thereby facilitating the operations of ground forces – an essential function that has been demonstrated in recent military engagements.

The recruitment process for military service is distinctive and underscores the unique nature of the profession. Unlike traditional job interviews, prospective service members are confronted with profound ethical conundrums, including the potential of taking another individual's life. As a self-sufficient, self-sustaining institution, the military encompasses a diverse array of roles, including administrative positions in human resources, finance, and catering. However, its primary mandate remains the defence and protection of the state against both external and, at times, internal threats. Discipline and unwavering obedience to the traditions, authority and culture are paramount within the military. Moreover, the military includes its own law enforcement agencies, such as the regulatory bodies that support the Royal Navy, the British Army has the Royal Military Police, and the Royal Air Force has the RAF Police (which was my own service).³

Furthermore, effective military functionality necessitates specialised logistical capabilities, which include air transport services dedicated to the rapid deployment of personnel; naval vessels for the transportation of troops and equipment, and rail-based facilities for the

³ I discuss and explore the details of my own military service – and positionality – further in this chapter, (see pages 19-23 below).

movement of assets both domestically and internationally. As a unique institution tasked with national defence, military personnel are expected to make significant personal sacrifices, including the possibility of physical injury or death. Maintaining a state of readiness throughout

the year, they undertake civil duties within the homeland and deploy to peacekeeping and conflict zones globally, often with little notice.

The historical context of the UK Armed Forces plays a significant role in shaping national identity, as well as competition among individual regiments. Notably, while the Royal Navy and RAF recruit on a national scale, the Army's recruitment often draws heavily from areas experiencing high levels of socio-economic deprivation. This discrepancy in recruitment demographics underscores the diverse nature of personnel across the three different branches and highlights the varied motivations and experiences of the individuals who choose to serve.

The National Army Museum (website) states that 'The regimental system of the British Army, is deeply rooted in the 17th century, emerging from a historical context wherein both aristocrats and professional soldiers were commissioned by monarchs and Parliament to recruit military contingents. These individuals, holding the rank of colonels, were responsible for the recruitment, organisation, and equipping of their respective regiments.' It continues stating that over time, the composition of these regiments varied significantly, reflecting differences in the number of regular, militia, and volunteer battalions. The subsequent regimental structure fostered a profound sense of service, comradeship, and regimental pride, which are seen as essential components for effective Army operation. Such factors have often been instrumental in empowering soldiers to achieve success, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges and under conditions of extreme duress.⁴

⁴ The historical context of military leadership is often illuminated through the examination of pivotal moments such as the stirring oration delivered by Colonel Tim Collins to his troops in March 2003, just before the onset of the conflict in Iraq. This speech is widely regarded as a compelling expression of resolve and inspiration, encapsulating the values and determination that are essential to effective military leadership. Colonel Collins

Contemporary initiatives aimed at streamlining and reforming the regimental structure of the Army have associated regiments with specific regions and recruitment patterns across the British Isles. Looking to maintain loyalties and established support networks across traditional counties. Despite the boundary adjustments associated with the new regiments, contemporary military structures still tend to be entrenched with socio-economic traditions associated with British heritage. This continues to be evidenced by the officer ranks, which are still largely comprised of individuals from more privileged backgrounds, particularly those educated at prestigious institutions such as Eton and Harrow. The examination of officer demographics within the British Army, as discussed by Otley (1973, p. 191), indicates that this trend persisted well into the early 1970s, with the assertion that 'Officership proves to have been a virtual monopoly of the public schools, amongst whom the major boarding schools were predominant.'

An inquiry by the BBC (2019) considered the extent to which there continues to be an overrepresentation of privately educated individuals among Army officers. The investigation revealed that 49% of candidates entering the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in January of that year were graduates of fee-paying schools. The BBC inquiry contended that this statistic stands in stark contrast to the Royal Navy, where 64% of officer cadets at the Royal Navy College, Dartmouth, were educated in state schools. The Royal Air Force, while not collecting similar demographic data, acknowledged that approximately 35% of its officer-level entrants

conveyed not only strategic imperatives but also the human aspect of warfare, emphasising the moral responsibilities that accompany armed engagement. Similarly, the actions of Colonel H. Jones, during the battle for Goose Green in the Falklands War serve as a quintessential example of courageous leadership under duress. His audacious assault on entrenched Argentine positions demonstrated not only tactical brilliance but also a profound commitment to his fellow soldiers, embodying the spirit of bravery that defines exemplary military conduct. Colonel Jones's initiatives during this critical juncture not only contributed to a decisive British victory but also left an enduring legacy that

at Cranwell had previously served without commission in the ranks. Notably, it has been observed that the highest-ranking positions within both the RAF and the Royal Navy

continues to inspire discussions on military ethics and leadership. These two figures, Colonel Collins and Colonel Jones, encapsulate the essence of military leadership through their actions and words, reflecting the complexities and moral dimensions of modern warfare. Their respective narratives underscore the need for leaders in armed conflict to not only pursue victory but also to engage with the deeper philosophical questions surrounding duty, honour, and the human cost of war. Such reflections are vital in fostering a comprehensive understanding of the role that effective leadership plays in shaping the outcomes of military engagements. have increasingly been awarded to individuals educated in state schools. However, this inclusivity has rarely extended to the Army.

Research carried out by Ashcroft (2014) and other scholars highlights a significant dichotomy within military demographics.⁵ It reveals that the upper echelons of the officer corps are predominantly composed of individuals from elite educational institutions, while the lower ranks are largely filled by personnel originating from the general populace. The latter group being primarily educated in state schools and often representative of areas within regions that experience increased levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Researcher Positionality

It is imperative to articulate my own positionality within the context of this study, particularly regarding my experiences while serving in the Royal Air Force Police (1995-2010). While I acknowledge the potential for biases and assumptions formed during my service, it is crucial to recognise and mitigate their influence throughout the research process. Nevertheless, my military background has afforded me an understanding of the culture, values, and lifestyle intrinsic to military life. Serving in the RAF was both an honour and a privilege, enabling me to collaborate with members of various military branches and forge enduring friendships.

⁵ Treadwell (2010), Fossey (2010), MacManus and Wesley (2011), Murrison (2010), Murray (date unknown), Moorhead (2021), Mottershead (2019)

Moreover, my status as a veteran facilitated my integration into the veteran community, which I believe played a significant role in fostering an environment where individuals felt comfortable sharing their life experiences candidly with me.

My own personal involvement

As a former Police officer of a home office police force and a member of the Royal Air Force Police and now considered to be a veteran, I am interested in the reasons as to why there are

large numbers of veterans who have come into contact with the criminal justice system in the UK and in particular those who have served prison sentences⁶.

My own reflections as a former member of the RAF Police – having served at home and in theatres on peacekeeping duties and war – have allowed me to identify my own struggles after leaving. I initially thought that I had transitioned well; perhaps with hindsight, it has not been so good. There are several events that meant that it did not go as smoothly as expected, such as injuries that I sustained whilst in the service, which are now placing limitations on my everyday activities. In December 2000, I had a serious car accident whilst on patrol at RAF Bampton Castle, where I was hit head-on by another vehicle at speed. It meant that I would suffer both neck and back pain for the rest of my service. However, it was not until May 2012, that the true extent of the accident became apparent after I had an MRI in my local hospital, which was 8 years after I left.

In 2002, I suffered a lower back problem when I was based at RAF Brize Norton processing a flight of special forces to Iraq. I suffered a spasm whilst moving baggage off the RAPISCAN

⁶ It is important to be explicit not only about my own interests in the topic but how my own experience may influence any assumptions that I may have with regards to the study and that I am mindful of this bias to enable me to address any such bias that I may have formed as a result of my own personal experiences.

X-Ray machine. This left me downgraded in my MEDCAT⁷ which meant that I was only able to carry out restricted duties. In 2003 I was posted to RAF Shawbury to the Defence Helicopter Flying School, which in comparison to Brize Norton, was very stifling. Although I was soon detached onto Op Telic and moved to Air Transport Security duties to process service personnel into and out of the Gulf theatre through South Cerney and RAF Brize Norton. All of this whilst undergoing marital problems at home.

I completed my own timeline to enable me to experience what I will be asking the participants to explore in their own lives, for them to be able to identify events that they consider to be important. It ensured that the process that I would use in the data collection was robust.

Whilst completing the timeline, I have been able to identify events and themes that have happened in my own life that led to a poor transition from service to civilian life. Those events that I have identified have led to restrictions on what I am able to do career-wise, and this has been compounded by further health issues such as strokes, a heart attack and being diagnosed as diabetic. I have spoken about those events in more detail below.

It is with these experiences in mind that I have chosen to carry out this research using both the methodology and methods that I have. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has not only allowed me to explore my own circumstances and life events, but it is ideal for exploring those of others. It enables the identification of themes that have occurred in participants lives just as it allows them to identify critical moments that may have led them to committing crime and their subsequent imprisonment.

⁷ MEDCAT in the military is the classification of what you can and cannot do. It ranges from desk duties to not being armed and dictates if you can serve abroad. In my case it prevented me from being detached and the carrying of arms.

This study aims to amplify the voices of veterans, enabling them to articulate their feelings and experiences while identifying the events that led to their involvement in the Criminal Justice System and subsequent incarceration. The focus is intentionally placed on the participants' perspectives rather than my own experiences or assumptions as a police officer or researcher. To facilitate a more authentic representation of their narratives, I have employed direct quotes from the study participants, allowing their views to take centre stage. While I possess personal experiences from my military service that provide me with a unique insight into the culture and societal norms – including prevalent issues such as alcohol use – my intent remains clear: this research centres on their stories, not my own.

In the case of this study, I will be exploring three distinct passages of the participants' lives, which are 1) Formative years (Pre-service), 2) Service life, and 3) Post-service life – in conjunction with the three areas of formal, non-formal, and informal education. The use of timelines was chosen as it was seen as an ideal vehicle to encourage participants to reflect on their life and identify along with pertinent events that they have experienced. In a study carried out by Marvesti (2004), he states that as humans we are naturally reflective and that we are keen novice researchers which allows us to identify problems and events. IPA allows for the processing of those reflections and to identify key events that may have led on to other things including the committing of crime. Timelines enable us to reflect upon our own lives and to identify those events that Marvesti claims that we are keen to reflect upon, which will then enable us to gain a better understanding of them.

The use of timelines has both positive and negative implications to it. It can be cathartic, in that it allows us to reflect upon events and deal with them. However, it can also prove very distressing if an individual has suffered trauma, either physical or psychological, that they find it difficult to think about. Personally, whilst doing my own timeline, there were events that caused a certain amount of anguish whilst recollecting them. My divorce was one such event

that caused me serious issues as I had two very young daughters at the time, and I am very family-oriented, so I missed out on a large chunk of their development, which grieves me.

Difficulties encountered by the study

The present study was conducted amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted global societies from 2020 to 2022. The pandemic has resulted in significant ongoing consequences, including elevated mortality rates and widespread lockdowns that severely restricted individual mobility. As of 2023, the emergence of a new COVID-19 variant continues to jeopardise societal freedoms and public health measures. Originally, the study aimed to conduct interviews within a prison environment; however, due to the persistent restrictions stemming from the pandemic, it became necessary to adapt the research setting. Consequently, veterans' hubs were utilised as a more accessible and safer environment for conducting the research.

This adaptation has not been without its challenges, particularly in terms of participant recruitment and navigating the associated ethical considerations. These elements have required careful attention and innovative approaches to overcome, ensuring the integrity and efficacy of the research process while prioritising the well-being of participants.

Personal difficulties

Throughout my academic journey, I have encountered several personal challenges that have significantly affected my studies. Notably, I experienced a heart attack in July 2020, followed by a diagnosis of long COVID in 2023. Most recently, I suffered a major stroke in November 2023, which resulted in paralysis on the left side of my body. These health setbacks have posed substantial obstacles to my academic progress and require careful consideration in the context of my scholarly work.

The situation described has profound physical implications as well as significant psychological effects. It has resulted in considerable fatigue and diminished concentration, as my cognitive processes are attempting to reorient in response to changes in my physical condition. Activities that were once considered simple, such as tying shoelaces, have become remarkably challenging. Unfortunately, the uncertainty regarding my potential return to a state that I perceive as normalcy remains a source of distress, as there is currently no definitive prognosis.

I am in the process of relearning fundamental movements, having lost the functionality of my left arm, which requires extensive retraining and rehabilitation. This is expected to be a prolonged endeavour. Until March 2024, my mobility was restricted to a wheelchair; however, I am now actively engaged in relearning how to walk. I am participating in a comprehensive regimen that includes physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and structured rehabilitation sessions in a gym-setting, all aimed at achieving a level of functional recovery that closely aligns with my previous state of normalcy.

During the course of conducting this study, I have endeavoured to navigate the challenges posed by the trauma I have experienced, particularly over the months following November 2023. A significant obstacle I face is persistent fatigue, which manifests as an overwhelming sense of exhaustion that adversely affects my ability to concentrate. This ongoing condition has made it increasingly difficult to reconcile with the possibility of enduring such fatigue indefinitely, or facing the risk of another stroke shortly.

The Veterans Population

There are an estimated 2.6 million veterans in the UK Finnegan et al. (2018, p. 510). A veteran is defined as somebody who has served 1 day in the UK armed forces as a regular or reserve⁸. The veteran population is integrated within the broader Armed Forces Community (AFC),

⁸ There is much debate about the definition of what a veteran is. There are arguments about those who have served only one day and not even completed their basic training course as being labelled as veterans Ashcroft (2014) raises this point.

which encompasses approximately 10 million individuals, including active service members and their families. According to Finnegan et al. (2018), the AFC is a heterogeneous cohort, varying significantly in terms of age, gender, and duration of service. The demographic breakdown of the veteran community reveals that it comprises 89.5% males, approximating 2,348,000 individuals, while females account for 10.5% or about 276,000 individuals. Notably, 52% of veterans are estimated to be aged 75 years or older, with 70% being over the age of 60, indicating that this population is predominantly ageing. Furthermore, official statistics from the Office for Veterans' Affairs (2020) indicate that 40% of veterans fall within the age range of 16 to 64 years, whereas 60% are aged 65 and above.

Veterans in the UK are subjected to social and ecological stressors akin to those faced by the general populace. Nonetheless, there is a prevalent perception that they possess heightened susceptibility to mental health challenges as a result of their military service, particularly combat exposure. The findings of the present study, challenge this prevailing viewpoint. A

thorough analysis of data obtained from veteran participants will be presented in the subsequent sections, offering deeper insights into their mental health experiences.

In a study conducted by Buckman et al. (2012, p. 410), it was reported that approximately 18,000⁹ personnel leave the UK Armed Forces annually. Individuals who exit their contracts before fulfilling the minimum required term are designated as early service leavers (ESLs). A study involving 845 participants identified that 80 individuals, representing 9.5% of the sample, were classified as ESLs. The authors of the study argue that several demographic and experiential factors are correlated with ESL status, including younger age, female gender, single marital status, lower rank, and service within the Army. Furthermore, there is a noted

⁹ There may be different numbers cited by different studies. This is wholly dependent on when the figures are actually sourced as some years there may have been more service leavers than others. For example, in 1995 there was options for change that saw a higher number take redundancy.

trend of ESLs reporting higher levels of childhood adversity; however, this was not found to be associated with deployment to Iraq. The authors highlight that ESLs face an elevated risk of developing probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), common mental health disorders, fatigue, and various physical symptoms, although no significant connection was established with alcohol misuse.

Buckman articulates the characteristics of early service leavers and delineates the challenges they encounter. This discourse is further elaborated upon in a report by the Royal British Legion (RBL), which highlights the complexities related to the recruitment of younger individuals, particularly their insufficient capacity to withstand the physical and psychological rigours inherent in military service. Notably, female recruits may face unique adversities, including instances of harassment or misogyny, which can prompt their decision to exit the military, with certain cases being influenced by pregnancy.

Additionally, it is pertinent to consider the potential for social isolation among younger, single personnel, who, due to their junior status, may lack opportunities for deployment in conflict zones. In cases where they do experience deployment, the compounded effects of traumatic

experiences can contribute to an increased incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among this demographic.

A subsequent report conducted by the Forces in Mind Trust (2024), which will be examined in more detail in this thesis, offers a revised definition of the term "early service leaver" (ESL) as an individual who does not complete a minimum of four years of military service. Furthermore, the report raises pertinent concerns regarding the recruitment of young individuals directly from secondary education. It posits that enlisting 16- and 17-year-olds, who may lack the requisite physical and psychological resilience, can render them vulnerable to various challenges upon their departure from the armed forces.

According to data presented by the Ministry of Defence and referenced in the 2020 factsheet published by the Office for Veterans' Affairs, the estimated number of individuals is approximately 15000¹⁰ service leavers every year. The reasons for individuals leaving can vary widely, including the natural completion of their service, disablement, inability to maintain fitness levels, redundancy, discharge for disciplinary reasons, and voluntary release (PVR). This latter category also encompasses those who choose to leave during basic training upon realising that military life is not suited for them.

Research veterans & 'veteranality'

The issue of care and welfare for servicemen and women in the UK armed forces has garnered significant attention in both public discourse and academic literature. Equally important is the ongoing discussion regarding the challenges faced by veterans – individuals who have transitioned out of military service and are attempting to reintegrate into civilian life. This reintegration process is often fraught with difficulties, including the alarming prevalence of homelessness among veterans. Reports indicate that up to 6% of the homeless population

may have a military background, prompting urgent calls for intervention. In response to these concerns, Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer had committed to eradicating rough sleeping among veterans by the year 2024. This initiative is supported by a substantial allocation of £8.5 million in funding and the strategic implementation of Operation Fortitude, aimed at addressing the complex needs of this vulnerable population.¹¹

The prevalence of veterans within the criminal justice system (CJS) has garnered considerable attention, as they are reported to constitute the largest cohort of any profession represented

¹⁰ Different years produce different statistics for service leavers and dependent upon events this figure can fluctuate.

¹¹ Op Fortitude is a new dedicated referral pathway introduced by the government for homeless veterans, including those sleeping on the streets. Gov.uk

in this sector, particularly among those incarcerated for violent and sexual offences (MacManus & Wessley, 2011). This observation is corroborated by subsequent research conducted by Phillips (2014) and Unwin and Winder (2021).

Despite this significant demographic presence, there exists a notable paucity of qualitative research focused on veterans within the CJS. Much of the existing literature tends to emphasise statistical analyses of the population involved and the offences committed (Fossey, 2011; MacManus & Wessley, 2011; Moorhead, 2021). Scholars such as Murrison (2010) and Treadwell (2010) have primarily concentrated their investigations on the mental health challenges faced by veterans who have engaged in criminal behaviour. In contrast, recent research by Mottershead (2019) and the prevailing consensus among experts, including Phillips (2014) and Ashcroft (2014), indicate that the majority of individuals transitioning from military service to civilian life do so with sound physical and mental health. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that a subset of veterans may experience difficulties during this transition, which can lead to their inadvertent engagement with the CJS and eventual incarceration.

In Murray's (2013) exploration of veteranality, the term is articulated to delineate 'the ways in which the criminal justice system has begun to come to terms with veterans who commit crime.' This concept is exemplified in the case of a soldier serving a prison sentence for

murder, stemming from an incident in which he punched an individual during a confrontation while working as a doorman in a pub in North Wales. The soldier perceived his treatment by the justice system as unjust, attributing this sentiment to his military background, during which he was characterised as a "trained killer" in the court proceedings.

The portrayal of veterans within both media discourse and academic debate frequently emphasises their status as victims, reflective of the psychological and social repercussions of their military service. In the United States (US), veterans who engage in criminal behaviour are managed through specialised Veterans Courts, and their health needs are addressed by

the Veterans Administration, which operates hospitals and healthcare facilities dedicated to this population. Furthermore, various cities across the US offer veterans housing initiatives. Conversely, in the UK, veterans convicted of crimes are subject to the conventional criminal justice system, as advocated by figures such as Lord Ashcroft and Phillips, who refute the necessity of establishing a separate court system specifically for veterans.

This study aligns with Murray's conceptualisation of veteranality, as the participants, comprising individuals with military service, predominantly from the army, have confronted the criminal justice system due to their engagement in criminal activities and behaviours. These veterans represent a significant demographic within the cohort of individuals serving prison sentences, suggesting a correlation with Treadwell's assertion that veterans are predisposed to criminality upon reintegration into civilian life after their service. Notably, although a minority of the participants experienced combat, with only one having served on the front lines, many occupied roles in humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts.

Common themes emerge among the participants, particularly regarding issues related to alcohol and substance abuse, which can be traced back to the military culture and the absence of structured support during their service. Murray notes the pervasive societal perception of veterans, which often leans towards a negative lens, framing them as individuals vulnerable to homelessness, addiction, and psychological distress. This negative portrayal not only affects their mental and physical well-being but also has profound implications for their future employability and integration into society, as highlighted by Ashcroft (2014), who advocates for a transformation of the prevailing narrative surrounding the Armed Forces Community. This shift is essential in fostering improved outcomes for veterans' post-service.

The research presented in this study reveals that the participants deviate from the conventional archetype commonly associated with veteran offenders. Specifically, as early service leavers (ESLs), each participant had completed service exceeding the four-year threshold as delineated by the Forces in Mind Trust (2024). All participants were above the age of 24, and

while some described their backgrounds as deprived, they articulated positive sentiments regarding their formative years.

Participants reported a predominantly positive familial upbringing, with diverse family structures, including single-parent households, blended families, and cases of parental absence due to military deployment. Notably, some participants experienced educational trajectories that contrasted with traditional schooling, attending boarding schools which provided stability amid parental deployment.

All but two participants exited their compulsory education equipped with a commendable standard of Level 2 qualifications and expressed general satisfaction with their educational experiences. One individual did not complete formal examinations, having already successfully passed the army entrance examination and subsequently enlisted, leading to a perception that further education was unnecessary. Another participant ceased attendance due to the psychological trauma stemming from the death of his father.

The majority of participants in this study enlisted in the armed forces immediately following their completion of secondary education, with a significant number joining the Junior Leaders Regiment (JLR). This phenomenon has been highlighted by FiMT (2024), which notes that individuals who enlist at a young age often lack the requisite capacity to manage the extensive physical and psychological demands associated with military service. Participants reported a range of experiences upon their induction into the army; many identified the prevailing culture and the absence of structured support as contributing factors to the difficulties they encountered post-service. Notably, individuals such as Lee and Simon explicitly articulated that the challenges they faced after leaving the military were rooted in their service experiences. Key concerns raised included issues related to alcohol misuse, substance abuse, and violence. Participants conveyed the sentiment that these challenges significantly contributed to the deterioration of their relationships, leading to episodes of homelessness,

increased interaction with the criminal justice system, and, in numerous instances, subsequent incarceration.

The issue of isolation emerged prominently in discussions, with one individual recounting their experience of being assigned to a unit where they were responsible for a block of residents with whom they shared little in common, particularly in terms of age and rank. This disconnection contributed to feelings of isolation, which in turn precipitated a downward trajectory into alcoholism. This progression ultimately led to the individual engaging in criminal behaviours, resulting in their involvement with the criminal justice system for offences related to alcohol abuse.

Additionally, conversations provided anecdotal evidence highlighting a notable absence of structure within military contexts, particularly in the army, which participants argued exacerbated alcohol-related problems. Some individuals articulated the concern that, during periods when troops were not engaged in exercises or deployments, an excess of idle time contributed to a culture of drinking.

Furthermore, it was suggested that there should be an increased focus on providing support for service members during their tenure in the military. This support could facilitate their preparation for civilian life, specifically by addressing challenges such as alcohol abuse and addiction. Such measures could promote better mental health outcomes and a smoother transition to life outside the military.

Whilst incarcerated, two of the participants were signposted to Project Nova, which supported them on their release from prison and placed them onto rehabilitation programmes. Which have proven to be successful for them, as neither has reoffended and withdrawn from their problems of alcohol and drugs. Some re-engaged with formal education and are now engaged with successful second careers, having left the military. Some are now involved in helping exservicemen and women overcoming the issues that they themselves have experienced. The

concept of "military" encompasses various dimensions, including the organised forces of a sovereign state responsible for defence, national security, and the enforcement of governmental authority. The military functions as a critical institution within political structures, playing a significant role in both domestic and international affairs. Its components include land, naval, and aerial forces, each equipped with specialised training and technology designed to address diverse security challenges. Moreover, the military's influence extends beyond combat, impacting areas such as diplomacy, humanitarian efforts, and societal frameworks.

The chapters in this thesis

In Chapter 1, I delineate the overarching framework and objectives of this study. I provide a comprehensive account of the contextual conditions that facilitated the evolution of the research into its current form. Furthermore, I reflect upon my personal experiences and positionality as a Police Officer within the Royal Air Force, situating my perspective within both a national and international military context.

In Chapter 2, I undertake an exploration of the concept of education, analysing its significance and the nuanced distinctions among the three categories: formal, informal, and non-formal education.

In Chapter 3, I conduct an extensive review of the existing literature to cultivate a nuanced understanding of prior research and its findings regarding the challenges faced by military personnel. This examination commences with an analysis of the prevalence of veterans within the criminal justice system, specifically emphasising those who have experienced incarceration. Furthermore, I will investigate the nature of the offences predominantly associated with this population to illuminate the underlying issues that contribute to their criminalisation.

In Chapter 4, I will further explore the contextual backdrop of life within the armed services, including a critical examination of my own biases and experiences during my tenure in the UK armed forces. This chapter will also provide an overview of prior research that has informed this study, highlighting the implications of these findings on policy initiatives pertaining to current personnel in the UK armed forces and the veterans who have transitioned out of service.

In Chapter 5, I undertake a comprehensive review of the existing literature to develop a nuanced understanding of prior research and its findings about the challenges encountered by military personnel. This examination begins with an analysis of the prevalence of veterans involved in the criminal justice system, with a particular focus on those who have been incarcerated. Additionally, I will investigate the nature of the offences with which these individuals are predominantly associated to elucidate the underlying issues contributing to their criminalisation.

In Chapter 6, I disclose the methodology comprising my theoretical philosophy that I have used and the rationale behind why I chose this approach. I discuss the use of the data collection methods that I have used, of timelines and semi-structured interviews, and how they add to this qualitative research study and provide a greater depth of data when used in conjunction with each other. I have considered the credibility of the study and openly discuss the potential of my own bias and experiences the ethical considerations that I have made. Finally, I have discussed my own experiences and the impact that they have had whilst conducting the study.

In Chapter 7, I present the findings derived from the thematic analysis of the data collected through timelines, semi-structured interviews, and additional conversations with participants. This chapter begins with an overview of the findings alongside a description of the participants who willingly shared their experiences and narratives. Following this introduction, I analyse the extensive data generated by both the timelines and semi-structured interviews, focusing on the lived experiences of the veterans involved. These accounts detail their developmental

journeys from childhood, the various stages of their lives, the motivations behind their decision to enlist in the military, and the contexts they encountered upon joining. Furthermore, I examine their reasons for departing from military service and the processes through which they adapted to post-military life.

This analysis is contextualised through a reflexive lens, incorporating educational frameworks and theories from Bourdieu, Merton, and Hirschi to elucidate the factors that contributed to the participants exhibiting criminal behaviours and their subsequent involvement in the criminal justice system. The chapter also addresses the trajectories of their rehabilitation, highlighting the support systems that they deemed essential to their recovery.

I detail the twelve emergent themes identified through the analysis, substantiated by direct quotations from participants. The themes encompass: 1. Family and childhood, 2. Education, 3. Reasons for joining the military, 4. Post-military life, 5. Reasons for leaving military service, 6. Post-military experience, 7. Substance use, 8. Criminal behaviour and activities, 9. Homelessness, 10. Structure, 11. Rehabilitation efforts, and 12. Educational experiences while in service.

In Chapter 8, I undertake a comprehensive analysis of the findings derived from the study, engaging in a detailed discussion that situates these results within the framework of relevant theoretical perspectives. This chapter aims not only to elucidate the implications of the findings but also to critically examine how they align with existing literature and theoretical constructs in the field. By contextualising the results, I seek to highlight their significance and contribute to a deeper understanding of the broader academic discourse. Therefore, this chapter will systematically explore the interplay between the empirical data collected and the established theories, fostering a nuanced dialogue that underscores the relevance and applicability of the findings in both practical and theoretical contexts. Through this analysis, I aim to provide a robust foundation for future research initiatives and to encourage further examination of the pertinent issues that have emerged from the study.

In Chapter 9, I present a comprehensive synthesis of the findings derived from the research conducted throughout this study. This chapter not only integrates the key insights obtained but also offers a critical reflection on the inherent limitations of the study. We recognise that no research is without constraints, and it is vital to address the factors that may have influenced the outcomes and interpretations of our findings. These limitations may encompass aspects such as sample size, methodological approaches, and external validity, which can inadvertently affect the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, we provide thoughtful recommendations for future research endeavours within this domain. By identifying gaps and potential avenues for further inquiry, we aim to encourage subsequent investigations that can enhance understanding and contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse. This chapter serves as a concluding reflection on the significance of our work, while simultaneously paving the way for future advancements in this area of study. We invite researchers to build upon our findings, employing innovative methodologies and diverse perspectives to expand the body of knowledge and address the challenges identified in this study.

Presentation style

The thesis predominantly employs a third-person narrative style; however, there are instances where personal experiences and reflections concerning life in the armed forces necessitate a shift to the first person. In the findings section, each identified theme is introduced with a direct quotation from participant data, drawn from timelines or interviews, thereby encapsulating the essence of that theme. In the discussion section, I have systematically linked each theme identified in the data to the philosophical frameworks employed in the analysis of the conversations, also engaging with and, at times, challenging existing assumptions within the extant body of research on this topic.

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to investigate the experiences of veterans who have been incarcerated, providing them with a platform to articulate the factors that may have contributed

to their engagement in criminal activities and associated behaviours. Employing a tripartite educational framework, the research seeks to examine the pivotal events that influenced their life trajectories. This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted role that education plays in shaping the narratives and life journeys of the participating veterans. By exploring these narratives, the study aspires to highlight the significant impact of educational experiences on the participants' lives, thus contributing valuable insights to the discourse surrounding education and rehabilitation within the context of veteran affairs.

Chapter 2

Why education?

Existing literature suggests that a correlation exists between low levels of formal educational attainment and increased instances of delinquency and criminality. Jagers et al. (2016, p.89) assert that 'school truancy, school failure, and dropout are highly correlated with delinquency and criminality.' Adding further detail, he points out that education encompasses both the processes of teaching and learning, such as the acquisition of knowledge along with wider social skills as well as technical competencies. He elaborates that education fundamentally enhances one's ability to comprehend information and apply it effectively in various contexts (Crews, 2009, p.5). However, and usefully for the context of this study, Crews (2009) posits that the relationship between education and criminality may not be as straightforward as established research perceives.

Crews (2009) discuss the following themes, indicating that lower levels of educational success correlate with an increased tendency to engage in risk-taking or criminal behaviour. Furthermore, low levels of educational attainment adversely affect future employment

prospects and contributes to an individual's vulnerability to exploitative situations, potentially leading to criminal involvement due to diminished cognitive capacity. On the flipside, Crews posits that communities with higher levels of education experience lower crime rates, and that individuals with greater educational attainment are less likely to encounter crime. Part of the remit of this study is therefore to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between formal educational attainment and pre-custodial behaviours and criminal actions associated with the veteran population (within the context of this study).

According to Johnson and Majewska (2022), the three forms of education – formal, non-formal, and informal – gained prominence in the 1960s. Norqvist and Leffler (2017, p. 238) conducted an exploration of the distinctions between these forms and their implications for learning processes and educational practices. They articulated that 'the concepts of learning and/or education are presented as formal, non-formal and informal', and further elaborated that 'together, these three concepts can be considered as covering life-wide and lifelong learning' (Norqvist and Leffler, 2017, p. 238).

The comprehensive research conducted by Johnson and Majewska underscores a critical gap in the current educational literature, particularly concerning non-formal education. While there is a robust body of scholarly work that explores the intricacies of both formal and informal education, the discourse surrounding non-formal education remains significantly underrepresented. This deficiency is particularly troubling given the increasing recognition of non-formal educational settings, which often serve as vital complements to traditional schooling and contribute meaningfully to lifelong learning processes. In light of this observation, this study must engage with and clarify the established definitions of the three primary educational formats – formal, informal, and non-formal education – within this context. Formal education typically encompasses structured educational systems governed by specific curricula and credentialing institutions, while informal education refers to the spontaneous, unstructured learning that occurs in everyday life. Non-formal education, however, occupies a

unique position between these two, characterised by organised educational activities that may occur outside the formal system but still provide systematic instruction and learning outcomes. By adopting these definitions, this study aims not only to address the existing gap in research on non-formal education but also to explore its implications for educational theory and practice. In doing so, it hopes to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the diverse educational landscapes and the various ways in which individuals can engage with and benefit from learning opportunities. Through this comprehensive examination, the study aspires to illuminate the significance of non-formal education and advocate for its recognition as an essential component of holistic educational frameworks.

The initial category of recognised educational formats is formal education, which is predominantly perceived as systematic instruction conducted within established educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities and adhering to a prescribed curriculum. In formal education, students' progress through a structured curriculum in a specific subject matter, acquiring a defined set of skills and theoretical knowledge that culminate in the attainment of a qualification. These qualifications are highly valued in both educational and professional contexts. Within this educational model, formal qualifications facilitate individuals' advancement from secondary education, encompassing GCSEs and Level 2 awards, to Further Education, represented by A levels, BTECs, and Level 3 awards, ultimately leading to Higher Education, which includes degrees and postgraduate qualifications. There is considerable emphasis on the importance of these qualifications in relation to career advancement and professional development.

Formal education is described as the 'methodical instruction, teaching, and training provided by professional educators.' Informal education, on the other hand, consists of learning through family, peers, and general social interactions, while non-formal education encompasses the social learning experiences gleaned from within formalised learning communities or contexts. Formal education and associated qualifications tend to be perceived as a key process and

resource that significantly influences a person's future behaviours and/or life-chances. This implies that formal education fundamentally shapes an individual's self-perceptions and their understanding of their potential.

Formal education as social control

In one sense, following the ideas of Robert Merton (1968) and Travis Hirschi (1983), formal education can be understood as a mechanism of social control, a social structure that enacts and perpetuates traditions, cultural norms, and societal values across generations. In this sense, formal education, such as schooling, college, and university, serves to regulate behaviours within society and its various subgroups. Formal education plays a critical role in enforcing social reproduction, a concept explored in depth as part of this study by Bourdieu's theory of habitus and the forms of capital – cultural, social, and financial. Formal educational characteristics and dynamics are especially pronounced within military structures, characterised by hierarchical leadership models and the backgrounds of those in positions of authority.

In his 2017 study, Swader (2017, p. 494) explores the relationship between the formalisation of social control and the phenomenon of anomie, posing the critical question, 'Can the formalisation of social control predict anomie?'¹² Drawing on the foundational concepts articulated by Émile Durkheim, Swader examines how uncertainties surrounding social norms and roles lead to a diminished understanding of societal expectations. He argues that such ambiguities, coupled with the accelerated pace of societal changes, heighten the risk of anomie and its associated ramifications, including increased incidences of crime and suicide. This analysis aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse regarding the efficacy of formal social controls in mitigating societal disintegration.

¹² Anomie refers to a state of normlessness or a breakdown of social norms and expectations within society that leads to feelings of alienation, disorientation and moral confusion as defined by Durkheim.

The concept of the “American Dream” necessitates adherence to specific criteria and societal norms, notably the pursuit of a robust education and the diligent effort to attain distinct social and cultural objectives. In examining individuals who engage in criminal behaviour, it is essential to recognise that such actions may indeed reflect conformity to the prevailing norms within their immediate social context. This localised adherence, however, often stands in stark contrast to the expectations and values upheld by the broader society. Thus, while these individuals may fulfil certain societal goals, their methods of achievement diverge significantly from the ideals traditionally associated with the American Dream.

Hopkins-Burke (2019, p. 320) suggests that the earliest sociological control theory was Durkheim’s “theory of anomie”, Durkheim suggested that too little social control occurred during times of rapid modernisation and societal change. This, he suggested, was because new forms of regulation were slow to evolve, the outcome of which he said was anomie. Emile

Durkheim considered deviance to be a normal part of society and that social structures were needed to apply a robust influence on individuals in a specific society to conform with its norms.

In his seminal work, “Leviathan” (2014), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) posits that individuals are not inherently social or political beings, resulting in a perpetual state of conflict among them. He contends that the attainment of true freedom necessitates the relinquishment of certain rights in exchange for the establishment of peace. Hobbes articulates that human beings possess an intrinsic greed, which, if left unchecked, could lead to a return to a state of war. Consequently, he advocates for the necessity of a robust governing authority to mitigate this propensity towards aggression, emphasising that social control is essential for the maintenance of order in society.

In his exploration of social control, the inquiry delves into the notion that individuals relinquish certain liberties to engage in a social contract that allows them to overcome intrinsic tendencies and coalesce into a structured society. Emile Durkheim further posited that the

efficacy of government is paramount in facilitating citizens' understanding of societal expectations; a deficiency in this guidance can engender confusion, ultimately leading to a state of anomie.

Complementing this perspective, Dewey (2011) articulates education as a fundamental social function, emphasising the role of community or social groups in perpetuating their existence through self-regeneration. He argues that this regeneration is predominantly achieved through the educational development of younger generations. Via various agencies – both intentional and unintentional – society effectively trains its members to embody its values and ideologies fully. Dewey elucidates the etymological roots of "education," interpreting it as a 'process of leading or bringing up' (Dewey, 2011, p. 10), thereby framing education as a vital agency of social control.

Merton advanced Durkheim's concept of anomie by introducing strain theory, which posits a direct correlation between the pursuit of the American Dream – specifically, the belief that a quality education will facilitate the attainment of a prosperous career and associated material wealth – and the societal conditions that may lead individuals to deviate from accepted norms. This framework underscores the disconnect experienced by certain demographic groups who, lacking equitable access to opportunities for success, may resort to criminal behaviour as a means of survival. Such behaviour can be interpreted as a response to the anomie conditions described by Durkheim, wherein individuals find themselves marginalised and deprived of the resources necessary to achieve socially sanctioned goals.

Strain theory examines the relationship between societal goals and the means available to individuals to achieve them through lawful behaviour. The concept of the "American Dream" posits that success is defined predominantly in terms of material wealth. However, the attainment of such wealth is contingent upon an individual's access to quality education, which is a prerequisite for securing viable employment opportunities. Unfortunately, various factors can obstruct access to quality education, including the low aspirations fostered within families,

the adverse educational experiences of parents, and broader social issues such as economic deprivation. These barriers can contribute significantly to the disjunction between societal aspirations and individuals' ability to realise them through legitimate channels.

The term social control is a general reference to the societal or political procedures both formal and informal, to which Hobbes and Durkheim allude that are used to control the behaviour of individuals and groups in a society that then leads to conformity and compliance to the rules of that particular society. Education is one such agent that is used to transmit these controls to students by socialising them into behaving in accepted ways, individuals are taught the acceptable boundaries of behaviour in this way. Social control is maintained using education, using methods such as indoctrination, and both formal and informal sanctions. Strain theory explores the intricate relationship between societal aspirations and the means at individuals' disposal to achieve these aspirations through lawful avenues. Central to this discourse is the concept of the American Dream, which primarily defines success in terms of material affluence. The pursuit of such wealth is intrinsically linked to an individual's access to quality education, a critical determinant for obtaining sustainable employment opportunities. However, numerous impediments can hinder access to quality education, including the limited aspirations cultivated within familial contexts, the negative educational experiences of parents, and pervasive societal challenges such as economic disenfranchisement. These barriers play a pivotal role in exacerbating the disjunction between societal objectives and individuals' capacity to attain them through legitimate pathways.

The manifestation of delinquent and criminal behaviours can be attributed to the divergent social norms upheld by distinct groups, as exemplified in this study by the military, which often exists in a state of conflict with the broader societal framework it will ultimately re-enter. Behaviours deemed acceptable within the confines of one subgroup may stand in stark contrast to the prevailing moral and ethical standards of the larger society.

Informal & non-formal education

The other two aspects of education – informal, and non-formal – also merit further definition and exploration, especially when considering the relationship between the CJE of Veterans, and the ecological contexts of their life-course events and wider environmental influences.

The second of the three educational categories is non-formal, which is described as any organised education that happens outside of (although in some instances it can be aligned with) formal systems of education. Norqvist and Leffler (2017) define non-formal learning as encompassing the concept of lifelong learning and acknowledge that learning occurs across a diverse range of settings and situations. It is described by Grajcevci and Shala (2016) as differing from formal education as it tends to be more flexible and learner-interest-focused, but nevertheless, learning still tends to be intentional and embedded. As noted, this type of learning tends to be student-centred and takes place mostly outside of the constraints of formal curricula; however, it still tends to take place in educational or training institutions with reduced contact time between teacher and student. The focus of non-formal education tends to be on developing the skills and mindsets of individuals.

The third educational format is that of informal learning and encompasses all forms of knowledge acquisition that occur outside of formalised, structured curricula and qualification or outcome-based modes of learning. This mode of learning enables individuals to internalise vital life experiences, including concepts such as hierarchy, time management, reward and punishment systems, as well as power dynamics and authority structures in everyday or professional life. Within military contexts, for instance, exercises and daily routines serve as critical platforms for servicemen and servicewomen to gain insights into the various dimensions of their specific roles and responsibilities.

Informal learning is inherently unstructured, lacking a prescribed curriculum or mandated qualifications. It manifests in a multitude of environments, including familial settings, social

groups, and broader societal contexts such as educational institutions, workplaces, and the community at large. Through these interactions, individuals acquire practical knowledge and skills that are essential for the navigation of everyday life. It is also generally recognised that we learn less from formal education than we do from the other 2 formats mentioned above. This is important to the study with regards to culture and the ecology of military life and how this can affect criminal and pre-custodial behaviours, risk-taking, and conformity with the environments that recruits and serving soldiers find themselves in.

The present study aims to investigate the participants' educational experiences by considering the multifaceted definitions of formal education, the attainment of qualifications, and the implications of underachievement in these areas, which have been posited by various researchers as contributing factors to criminal behaviour. Ashcroft (2014) discusses the entry requirements of the UK's armed forces, which are set at Entry Level 2, corresponding to the numeracy and literacy competencies typically expected of individuals aged seven to eight years. While he notes that recruits from the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force generally exhibit higher academic standards, data indicate that only 3.5% of army recruits meet the Entry Level 2 criteria, and a mere 39% achieve the benchmarks associated with an eleven-year-old's academic performance.

Ashcroft (2014) acknowledges that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has contemplated raising educational standards for recruitment; however, this initiative was ultimately abandoned due to the necessity of maintaining competitiveness with other employment sectors, leading to a reliance on the available talent pool to fulfil the operational demands. To address these educational deficits, he emphasised the implementation of a variety of assessments, including attitude, physical fitness, commitment to training, and overall trainability. Moreover, he asserts that all service members are required to attain Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications in numeracy and literacy within a three-year timeframe. Advancement within the ranks necessitates meeting

these educational requirements, with Level 1 mandated for promotion to corporal and Level 2 for the rank of sergeant.

The present study takes a reflective approach to education and aims to explore the educational, social, and environmental factors that may have influenced participants' engagement in pre-custodial and criminal justice-related behaviours. It seeks to investigate the various educational pathways through which these individuals acquired the knowledge and skills that ultimately led them toward problematic and risk-taking behaviours. By examining the formal, informal, and non-formal skills developed during military service, this study aims to provide a broader understanding of the context of participants' experiences and the factors influencing their behaviours.

Moreover, Crews (2009) identifies several themes and impacts concerning the interplay between education and crime. Crews contends that a lack of education often increases the likelihood of involvement in criminal and anti-social behaviour and that insufficient educational attainment diminishes future employment opportunities, especially in light of escalating hiring standards in society. Additionally, Crews posits that low educational attainment may correlate with limited IQ, rendering individuals more susceptible to exploitation and the chance of secondary criminal involvement. This assertion regarding the relationship between low educational attainment and reduced IQ is highly contentious, a viewpoint with which I express disagreement, as educational attainment should not be conflated with a person's IQ. I do concur, however, that stringent employment criteria pose significant barriers to securing viable work post-service release, particularly for those unable to pass formal examinations, an ability that does not necessarily reflect their IQ or potential for high-level employment. KennedyTurner et al. (2021) reference contemporary studies indicating that higher educational attainment correlates with a decreased likelihood of involvement in criminality.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

McManus and Wessley (2010, p. 1) delineate three primary, albeit overlapping, categories of vulnerable veterans that encapsulate the complexities of their experiences both prior to and following their military service. The first category comprises veterans who come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds, including those facing socioeconomic hardships, lack of access to education, or unstable family environments. This group may have had prior involvement in criminal activities before their enlistment in the armed forces, often seeking military service as a means of escaping their circumstances. These individuals may face significant challenges in their transition to civilian life, as their past experiences can influence their reintegration efforts and contribute to ongoing issues related to stability and support. The second category focuses on those veterans who encountered various difficulties during their time in service, which may include mental health issues such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, or physical injuries sustained during active duty. These challenges can lead to early discharge from the military, leaving these individuals to navigate a complex landscape of healthcare needs and social reintegration. The toll of their experiences can create long-lasting effects that complicate their ability to adapt to life after service, warranting targeted support and interventions. The third category encompasses veterans who may have enjoyed what appeared to be successful military careers. However, upon discharge, they often face unforeseen challenges that can disrupt their reintegration into civilian life. Such challenges might include difficulties in finding stable employment, adjusting to changes in social dynamics, or grappling with a sense of identity that was closely tied to their military role. These veterans may feel isolated and unsupported in navigating the transition, which can exacerbate feelings of disconnection from both their peers and society at large. Overall, these categories highlight the multifaceted nature of veteran vulnerability, underscoring the necessity for tailored support systems that address

the unique needs of each group. Understanding these distinctions is key to fostering effective interventions that can assist veterans in their journey toward successful reintegration and long-term well-being.

Their report concludes that alcohol misuse constitutes a significant issue for veterans both during and after their military service. It further references themes of social exclusion and the financial hardships faced by this population. Notably, the authors explicitly discount psychological disorders such as PTSD and anxiety conditions, often associated with military service and combat experience, as direct contributors to criminal behaviour.¹³ In a previous study conducted by Fear et al. (2007) on the drinking behaviours of service personnel, it was established that 67% of male and 49% of female members of the UK Armed Forces exhibited an Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) score of 8 or higher, categorising them as engaging in hazardous drinking. In contrast, only 38% of men and 16% of women in the general population were classified as hazardous drinkers. The results indicated a consistently higher prevalence of hazardous drinking among both male and female military personnel across various age groups.

In a more contemporary and comprehensive study conducted by Short et al. (2018), the researchers illuminated the complex relationship between military veteran status and subsequent involvement with the criminal justice system (CJS) following the conclusion of military service. The findings revealed that a small, yet statistically significant, proportion of military veterans transition into the CJS, suggesting that the challenges faced by this population extend beyond their service and into the civil sphere. The study meticulously characterised the demographic profile of veterans within the CJS, noting that they tend to be older than their non-veteran counterparts. Interestingly, the data indicated that veterans are

¹³ This also chimes with the findings generated as part of this study.

generally less likely to experience unemployment; however, this does not preclude them from facing unstable living arrangements, including instances of homelessness, which may

significantly impact their reintegration into society. Moreover, the analysis highlighted several concerning trends associated with veteran status, notably an increased propensity for engagement in interpersonal violence and motoring offences. These findings raise important questions regarding the mental health and well-being of veterans, as the study also correlated veteran status with elevated levels of anxiety disorders and hazardous drinking patterns. Such patterns may reflect a coping mechanism for the psychological stressors encountered during and after military service. Conversely, the researchers observed that veterans were less likely to engage in certain types of criminal behaviour commonly associated with acquisitive offences. Additionally, the prevalence of psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), as well as substance misuse, appeared to be lower among veterans in comparison to the general population of offenders. These nuanced findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support systems that address the specific challenges faced by veterans as they navigate the reintegration process into civilian life. The implications of this research are significant, calling for a deeper understanding of the intersection between military service, mental health, and criminal behaviour, and highlighting the importance of developing tailored approaches that reflect the unique experiences of this demographic within the criminal justice framework.

The findings of Short et al. demonstrate a significant correlation with the concept of anomie as articulated by Durkheim and further developed by Merton. Upon reintegration into civilian life, individuals transitioning from military service often experience uncertainty regarding societal norms and expectations. This disconnect arises from their prior immersion in the military institution, which may not adequately facilitate a smooth transition back to civilian society. Goffman (1961), in his seminal work "Asylum," explores this phenomenon by discussing how individuals are shaped by the institutional environment, adopting specific norms and modes of

thought, only to return to society with a lack of clarity about their roles and the expectations that accompany them. This failure to effectively navigate the complexities of reintegration may contribute to the sense of alienation experienced by veterans in civilian contexts.

One of the seminal works I reviewed was authored by Professor Matt Fossey, whose paper *Across the Wire: Veterans' Mental Health and Vulnerability* (2010) explores the multifaceted challenges encountered by service personnel upon their transition to civilian life. Fossey's analysis encompasses mental health concerns while also addressing the social and psychological issues impacting individuals both before, during, and after their military service. He posits that familial, educational, and social factors can significantly predispose individuals to precursory criminality and subsequent interactions with the criminal justice system.

Fossey raises pertinent questions about the profile of individuals who enlist in the military, emphasising a correlation between recruitment catchment areas in high-deprivation areas and an increased likelihood of criminal behaviour. Furthermore, his study reiterates the association between alcohol consumption and mental health issues prevalent among military personnel.

I had the opportunity to engage with Professor Fossey multiple times throughout my research journey and so had plenty of opportunity to discuss his paper and its implications in person. He expressed steadfast support for my pursuit of the current study (as part of this thesis) and reiterated the importance of the need to address the gaps within his work (Fossey, 2010).

A decade after Fossey's publication, Justin Moorhead (2020) conducted a comprehensive study examining veterans within the criminal justice system. Moorhead notes a growing recognition of military veterans as a distinct population in this context, emphasising that the prevalence and nature of their offending behaviour, alongside associated mental health concerns, have become focal points within existing research. However, he acknowledges the pressing need for more nuanced insights into the complexities of this demographic's lived experiences.

Moorhead advocates for a significant paradigm shift in the discourse concerning the mental health of veterans, urging a transition from an exclusive focus on individual mental health issues to a more comprehensive examination of the systemic roles and responsibilities of military institutions in shaping veterans' lived experiences. This critique is particularly pertinent in light of the pervasive media and political narratives that often overlook institutional accountability and the complex dynamics within military culture that contribute to the psychological well-being of service members. Moorhead highlights a critical gap in our understanding of how many service members endure adverse psychological effects stemming not only from direct combat experiences but also from the prevailing military culture itself, which may foster an environment of stigma and silence around mental health challenges. Current literature indicates that veterans are disproportionately represented within the criminal justice system. This phenomenon, researchers such as Fossey, McManus, Wessley, and Moorhead argue, necessitates a deeper exploration of the underlying causes beyond the visible symptoms typically associated with military service, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse disorders. While symptoms of PTSD and substance abuse are well-documented within the population of veterans, Moorhead posits that it is equally crucial to examine the more complex and often underexplored issues associated with military culture, lack of adequate support systems, and the transition to civilian life. These deeper socio-cultural factors could be contributing to veterans' violations of societal norms, leading to interactions with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, Moorhead has committed to an extensive investigation into this topic, utilising various academic databases and targeted keywords to uncover insights that have often been overlooked in existing scholarship. It is important to note that throughout this exploration, many former Armed Forces personnel may not readily self-identify as "veterans," which can complicate the gathering of data and the development of interventions aimed at addressing their unique needs. In sum, a multifaceted approach that considers both individual mental health and institutional influences is essential

to fully understand and effectively address the challenges faced by veterans in contemporary society.

The definition of veterans presents a contentious issue, as articulated by Ashcroft (2014), who opted to employ the widely accepted definition in his report addressing the transition of military personnel to civilian life, referred to colloquially as "civvy street" in military contexts. The contention surrounding this definition primarily stems from the circumstances surrounding one's service duration. For instance, an individual may technically be classified as having served for a day by exiting during basic training; despite their lack of substantive military engagement, they may still identify as (and in UK contexts, be considered as) a veteran.

Treadwell (2010) highlights a concerning outlook for military personnel who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, emphasising media representations of casualties, particularly the 200 UK armed forces members killed in Afghanistan. He warns that mental health issues among veterans will likely continue, identifying "forgotten casualties" – those who appear physically fine but may still suffer psychologically. This perspective raises important questions about the future of these service members as they reintegrate into civilian life.

From a criminological standpoint, Treadwell argues that the discourse surrounding armed forces personnel and criminal justice-related experiences largely pertains to crimes committed during military engagements, with scant consideration being given to those individuals perpetrating additional crimes upon their return to civilian life. He highlights a deficiency in the research addressing the correlation between military service and criminal behaviour, though he acknowledges an emerging awareness of the disproportionate representation of veterans within the criminal justice system. This recognition is accompanied by an expanding corpus of evidence suggesting an increasingly notable prevalence of armed forces personnel engaging in criminal activities relative to broader populations. In his analysis, Treadwell critically interrogates the reliability of data produced by the Home Office, furthering the need for rigorous

research in this domain¹⁴. Research has shown that the prison population consisted of between 4% and 6% who had once served in the armed forces at some point. He describes

these figures as rather conservative, that these figures had subsequently been revised upwards and how the government had openly admitted that it was unattainable to establish how many of those serving prison sentences had served in the military and even more so, how many had served in armed conflicts, as the data was not collected centrally.

The research conducted by Napo in 2008¹⁵ revealed that approximately 9.1% of the prison population had prior connections to the armed forces. Treadwell argues for the significance of estimating the number of veterans within the prison system, yet he also emphasises that reducing this complex issue to a mere numerical analysis is a myopic approach. Napo's findings indicate a troubling trend wherein a significant number of ex-service veterans are convicted of a diverse array of offences, with violent crimes particularly prevalent.

A recent study conducted by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) (2025, p. 28) examined a sample of 1,957 offenders. The findings revealed that: 36.2% (n=806) of offenders had a documented offence before their service. 69.6% (n=1,301) of offenders committed an offence during their service period. Among exserving personnel (n=1,247), 29.1% (n=341) recorded an offence after their service. These statistics highlight notable trends regarding offending behaviour during pre-service, during service, and post-service periods.

The NACRO (2025, p. 28) report also identified that the incidence of criminal behaviour was found to be highest during the post-service period and lowest in the pre-service phase.

¹⁴ The Home Office is the government department responsible for the safety and security of the country and its citizens which encompasses crime and terrorism amongst its remits.

¹⁵ The study conducted by NAPO (2008) was the most recent and there has subsequently been no further research from them. However, the statistics produced by the study instigated several studies into the subject of the number of veterans in prison.

Furthermore, the rates of non-violent offences consistently exceeded those of violent offences throughout the study period.

While the validity of these statistics may be subject to debate, their implications cannot be overlooked; they highlight the overrepresentation of the armed forces community, particularly

those who have served in the British Army, within the prison population. These alarming figures necessitate the need for further inspection regarding the underlying reasons for such a high incidence of involvement CJE of Veterans, especially among incarcerated individuals.

Throughout his study, Treadwell acknowledges that current members of the armed forces have legitimate grievances, citing issues such as being overstretched, inadequately housed, and poorly equipped during deployments. As of 2024, these concerns have been exacerbated by additional government cuts and challenges in recruitment, resulting in a reduction of the UK armed forces from 190,000 to 170,000 personnel across all branches – the Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force. This decline has raised significant anxieties within military leadership regarding the capacity to effectively defend the nation. Notably, strategic allies, including the US military, have suggested that the UK no longer qualifies as a top-tier fighting force.

The process of transition to civilian life for service members is critically examined in the work of Ashcroft (2014), which provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors impacting veterans as they reintegrate into society. The study suggests a consensus among researchers and policymakers alike that individuals leaving the armed forces frequently do so in a condition that is both physically and psychologically sound. This notion challenges some common stereotypes about veterans struggling with severe issues upon their return. However, Ashcroft acknowledges that, despite this general observation, a significant number of veterans encounter various difficulties while navigating this transition. These challenges can range from finding suitable employment and housing to coping with the emotional and social adjustments that come with leaving a structured military environment. The disparities in individual

experiences highlight the need for tailored support systems that address these challenges more effectively. Ashcroft further stresses the importance of facilitating a successful reintegration into society, particularly given the substantial investment made in the training and professional development of military personnel over the years. The skills and experiences gained during military service can significantly contribute to civilian life; however, without appropriate support during the transition period, these valuable assets may remain underutilised. Consequently, there is a reasonable expectation among the public that these individuals, having received high-quality training and developed a strong work ethic, should be able to make positive contributions upon their departure from military service. This expectation underscores the societal responsibility to support veterans as they transition into civilian roles, acknowledging not only their sacrifices but also the potential benefits they can bring to communities and workplaces. In summary, the transition from military to civilian life is a complex process that requires a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges faced by veterans. Ashcroft's work contributes to an important dialogue regarding how best to support these individuals, emphasising the need for comprehensive resources and programs that facilitate successful reintegration and harness the talents of those who have served. Such efforts not only honour their commitment to their country but also enrich the fabric of society as a whole.

Ashcroft's 2012 research shows that while public perception of the armed forces is largely positive, 91% of the British public believes former service members commonly face physical, emotional, or mental health challenges. He argues that this perception is inaccurate and harmful, as it perpetuates stigma that hinders veterans' reintegration and employment opportunities. Ashcroft advocates for improving the transition process to help reframe service leavers as valuable societal contributors instead of victims.

Ashcroft states he would like the public and employers to look at service leavers and the military in general as being allied to greater skills and career prospects. There were several

issues related to transition that were addressed by the Ashcroft report which suggested that there was a need for:

- Good transition stating that is not only important to the individual but also to society in general for those leaving the armed forces to make that transition from the military back into civilian life (civvy street).
- It is suggested that there is adequate provision for service leavers and that most transition well after leaving the military and move on to develop good second careers on returning to civilian life.
- Ashcroft acknowledges that it is important that individuals plan for leaving the armed forces and that there needs to be good provision of information which is imperative to enable a good transition.
- To ensure this happens personnel should complete a personal development plan (PDP).
- It is suggested that those who have completed basic training should be entitled to the full support package available.
- New work placement schemes should be available for service leavers.
- A single service contact centre should be established to support service leavers and veterans.
- A register of armed forces charities should be created.

To date, the last two have been set up to support service leavers and veterans. There has been the introduction of the veteran's gateway that brings together all the support available to those service leavers and veterans. There has also been a directory of charities that support service leavers created which is the Confederation of Service Charities (COBSEO).

Ashcroft highlighted the areas that service leavers struggle with such as education and training, resettlement and employment, housing, health, welfare and the third sector, and financial aspects.

It is common knowledge and stated by Fossey (2010) that traditional recruitment into the military is targeted at areas of high social and economic deprivation where educational attainment is much lower than in more affluent areas, which in turn is then linked to higher rates of offending behaviours. It is then highlighted that the educational threshold for entry to the armed forces is very low, a fact that is also accepted by Ashcroft in his report.

It is also accepted that joining the armed forces can offer potential to individuals from such areas that they could not get in their local area. The opportunity of paid employment alongside prospects of travel and the experiences that this entails, there are other benefits such as subsidised accommodation and food, as well as opportunities to partake in sport and adventurous training that would not normally be accessible to them. In these circumstances, the appeal of a career in the armed forces could be very strong.

Fossey contends that it is important to understand the backgrounds of individuals joining the armed forces. He argues that the media focuses on mental health, imprisonment, alcohol abuse and homelessness but fails to address the wider issues and that by joining the armed forces, there are lots of positive opportunities open, such as those mentioned above, that make joining the armed forces a positive choice compared to the alternatives available if they were to remain in the local area.

An area of concern that was raised by Fossey, which was addressed by Ashcroft, was the entitlement to transition support. He highlighted that this was dependent upon how an individual was discharged from the services. It is stated that those who have served the longest get the largest amount of support that is available, whilst those who leave early get the least support on offer. There is a difference between the support offered to those who have suffered

physical injury and those who have suffered psychological injuries whilst those that have committed offences and have been sent to the Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC) Colchester are an even bigger issue when it comes to their transition from the military. The recommendations by Ashcroft are discussed above in which he suggests that all individuals who have completed their basic training should be given the full resettlement package to assist their return back into civilian life.

Ashcroft often refers to early service leavers as suffering the most problems after leaving the armed forces as they get the least support. Research conducted by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) (2024) clarifies what an early service leaver is and the problems that they face as a result, 'In recent years, emerging evidence has highlighted that those who leave the Armed Forces before completing the minimum term of their contract (i.e., under four years) – known as Early Service Leavers (ESLs) – may be vulnerable to a range of post-Service challenges'.

The paper acknowledges that the majority of ESLs are from the army stating, 'available evidence indicates that the Army is the most represented Service among ESLs', and justifying this 'the Army has the largest intake of the three branches and has been suggested to recruit from more socially deprived areas where the recruited youths may be more likely to encounter adverse childhood experiences'.

The Ashcroft Report highlights the importance of recognising service leavers and the military as valuable assets with unique skills. It emphasises the need for a smooth transition to civilian life for both individuals and society. Most service leavers can successfully adapt and build meaningful second careers when provided with adequate support. Key recommendations include the development of Personal Development Plans (PDPs), ensuring access to comprehensive support services post-basic training, introducing new work placement schemes, establishing a centralised contact centre for service leavers and veterans, and creating a registry of armed forces charities for support.

There can be many reasons for early discharge, but the report suggests that we should first examine what might lead to the involuntary discharge of 'untrained' personnel. This can occur due to very minor infractions or slight declines in performance, which vary depending on the Service branch. For example, using a mobile phone at an inappropriate time or failing physical tests (such as swimming) during basic or specialised training can trigger such discharges. On the other hand, for those who leave at 'trained strength', early discharge is often due to more serious disciplinary issues, including failing drug tests and alcohol use.

The paper then states that pre-enlistment issues may be responsible for early release from service. Issues such as coming from challenging pre-service backgrounds including socioeconomic backgrounds and low educational attainment, especially numeracy and literacy which appear to be correlated. The research conducted by Napo in 2008 indicates that approximately 9.1% of the prison population has prior associations with the armed forces. Treadwell underscores the importance of quantifying the veteran demographic within the prison system while simultaneously cautioning against a reductionist view that simplifies this intricate issue to mere numerical representation. Napo's findings reveal a concerning trend of elevated conviction rates among ex-service personnel, particularly regarding a diverse spectrum of offences, with a notable prevalence of violent crimes.

Although the veracity of these statistics may be subject to scrutiny, their implications warrant serious consideration, as they illuminate the overrepresentation of the armed forces community, particularly those who have served in the British Army, within the penal system. Such alarming data prompt critical reflection on the underlying factors contributing to the disproportionate involvement of this demographic within the criminal justice framework, necessitating further investigation into the causal elements associated with this phenomenon.

Treadwell's study highlights concern among armed forces members regarding overstretching, inadequate housing, and insufficient equipment, issues that have intensified due to government austerity and recruitment challenges. As of 2024, the UK armed forces have been

reduced to around 190,000 to 170,000 personnel, causing anxiety among military leadership about national security and diminishing the UK's status as a top-tier military power, as suggested by assessments from strategic allies like the US military.

Moreover, the transition from military to civilian life is critically examined in Ashcroft's (2014) work, which reflects a general consensus that individuals departing from the armed forces typically do so in a condition that is both physically and psychologically sound. However, the research acknowledges that a subset of veterans faces challenges in navigating this transition.

Ashcroft emphasises the necessity of facilitating a successful reintegration into society, particularly considering the substantial investments made in the training and development of military personnel. Consequently, there exists a public expectation that these individuals should be positioned to contribute positively to society following their military service.

Additionally, Ashcroft references his own 2012 research, highlighting a predominantly positive public perception of the armed forces. Nonetheless, he expresses concern over the striking statistic that 91% of the British population perceives it as common for former service members to experience some form of physical, emotional, or mental health challenge upon leaving military duty. Ashcroft contends that such perceptions are not only misleading but also counterproductive to the reintegration process, fostering a narrative that the military inadequately supports its members. This stigma, he argues, constitutes an additional barrier for veterans seeking employment opportunities. He posits that enhancing the transition process could recalibrate the prevailing narrative, framing service leavers as valuable societal contributors rather than as victims, thereby ensuring that appropriate opportunities are accessible to them.

The recruitment of individuals as young as 16 or 17 into military service raises significant concerns regarding their capacity to meet the physical and psychological demands imposed by military training and operations. Research indicates that the military environment may

exacerbate existing mental health issues among recruits, thereby compromising their overall well-being. Furthermore, the lack of adequate preparation for reintegration into civilian life following discharge presents substantial challenges for these individuals.

A notable proportion of early service leavers (ESLs) tend to possess low educational attainment, with many under the age of 24 exiting the military having achieved only low ranks. This demographic often faces significant barriers to securing educational qualifications during their service, ultimately leaving them at a competitive disadvantage in the civilian job market, where they struggle against candidates with more robust educational backgrounds and professional experiences.

The implications of this educational gap are profound; ESLs are statistically more likely to become "at risk of offending" if they do not obtain employment or engage in training activities within six months post-discharge. This trend underscores the concerning overrepresentation of veterans within the Criminal Justice System.

In a 2010 study conducted by Murrison examining the mental health of both active-duty personnel and veterans, it was posited that military service is generally correlated with positive physical and mental health outcomes. However, Murrison's findings also revealed that cases, such as that of Corporal Johnson Beharry VC, bring to the fore significant issues related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other service-related challenges, including Mild Traumatic Brain Injuries (mTBI)¹⁶. These findings highlight the complexity of mental health issues within military populations and the necessity for comprehensive support systems

¹⁶ Headway describe mTBI as an injury to the brain caused by trauma to the head of which there are many causes such as traffic collisions, assaults, falls, and accidents at home or work. It is defined by loss of consciousness for between 15 minutes and up to 6 hours. Anything over 6 hours is considered to be severe. The effects of TBI's are dependent upon several factors such as type, location, and severity of the injury. It can cause symptoms such as loss of balance, co-ordination issues, headaches and dizziness, and cognitive, emotional and behavioural problems including fatigue and anger. According to recent research in America (Health.Mil, 2021) it was discovered that symptoms associated with mTBI such as headaches, dizziness, and cognitive dysfunction are frequently displayed by service personnel who have suffered head injuries. The study states that it is the most common brain injury suffered by those in the military and is caused by experiencing blasts such as improvised explosive devices.

Murrison also links the abuse of alcohol which is a significant part of military life to involvement in the criminal justice system. A result of the study saw Murrison (2010) make several recommendations regarding mental health interventions such as the incorporation of a structured mental health system, which would look at the medical examinations in place for those already serving. An increase in mental health professionals to undertake work with veterans. An information service for veterans that would become available 12 months after an

individual had left the services and finally the trial of an online intervention service for both serving personnel and veterans.

Treadwell (2010) acknowledges how there was little research into the relationship between military service and criminal behaviour. This is despite the recognition and statistics that veterans may have been disproportionately represented across every level of the Criminal Justice System, from arrests at Police custody facilities through to incarceration in prison, and all stops in between.

In this study, Treadwell deliberates how the government had suggested that over the years of 2001, 2003 and 2004 veterans made up between 4% and 6% of the prison population. However, Treadwell refers to a study carried out at HMP Dartmoor by the Ministry of Defence in conjunction with service charities that disclosed that 16.75% who took part in it, had been in the military.

A study carried out by Johnson (2018) also endeavoured to make a correlation between mental health by way of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Criminal behaviour, in which the discourse relates to American service personnel. These American servicemen and women who had served in the same theatres as the Treadwell study in Iraq on Operation Iraqi

Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) in Afghanistan. She states that veterans returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with symptoms of PTSD at “an alarming rate”, which she says puts them at higher risk of a full diagnosis. It is also discussed by Johnson that research in the past had also made this correlation between the diagnosis of PTSD and violent behaviour. Like Treadwell, Johnson talks about how veterans from these conflicts, in which both British and American armed forces served, are being incarcerated in large numbers. She also reveals that a study carried out by Tsai et al. (2013) showed that 38% of veterans who had been incarcerated had been convicted of violent offences such as murder, manslaughter, robbery, and assault. It is also noted by Johnson that the Board of Justice Studies revealed that 8% of the prison population in all the variants of correctional facilities in the United States of America were veterans.

In Canada, Cotes et al. (2020) discovered that, just like the UK, there is limited literature available on former military personnel who have been incarcerated. It is discussed by Cotes that the correlation between military service and crime is well recognised and has been since just after the Vietnam War. They state it was during the period after the war that the US Bureau of Justice started collecting statistics on the prior military service on those incarcerated. The data collected by the bureau identified several risk factors leading veterans to incarceration such as substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness and previous criminal convictions. It was noted that exposure to war and conflict may have had an impact on those serving and subsequently led to criminal behaviour. A study in 2008 cited by Cotes on US service personnel found that one-fifth of them returning from the war zone presented with symptoms of PTSD. However, in Canada, it was reported that up to 10% of their personnel who had seen action presented with the same as their US counterparts. The recruitment of individuals as young as 16 or 17 into military service raises critical concerns regarding their ability to fulfil the physical and psychological demands associated with military training and operations. Empirical research suggests that the military environment has the potential to exacerbate preexisting

mental health conditions among recruits, thereby jeopardising their overall well-being. Furthermore, the insufficient preparation for reintegration into civilian life upon discharge poses considerable challenges for these individuals.

A significant proportion of early service leavers (ESLs) exhibit low educational attainment, with many individuals under the age of 24 exiting the military having achieved only low ranks. This demographic frequently encounters substantial obstacles in securing educational qualifications during their service, ultimately resulting in a competitive disadvantage within the civilian job market, where they face candidates possessing more extensive educational and professional credentials.

The ramifications of this educational disparity are profound; ESLs are statistically more inclined to become "at risk of offending" if they do not obtain employment or engage in training activities within six months following their discharge. This trend highlights the concerning overrepresentation of veterans within the Criminal Justice System.

Murrison (2010) investigated the mental health of both active-duty personnel and veterans, positing that military service is generally associated with favourable physical and mental health outcomes. However, Murrison's findings also illuminate cases, such as that of Corporal Johnson Beharry VC, which underscore significant issues of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other service-related challenges, including Mild Traumatic Brain Injuries. These findings emphasise the complexity of mental health issues within military populations and highlight the necessity for comprehensive support systems to address these challenges effectively. Murrison also links the abuse of alcohol, which is a significant part of military life, to mental health issues, and he indicates that this is more common in those who have seen combat. He also makes the correlation between mental health, homelessness, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

In the UK, Treadwell cited research undertaken by the voluntary organisation Veterans in Prison, who had undertaken a study in ten prisons where they discovered that 118 out of a population of 1191 had a military background. This would possibly represent a figure of 9.1% across the prison population that is veterans and compares favourably with those figures found in both the US and Canada. A report conducted by NAPO (2008), also referred to by Treadwell also raised concerns about the number of ex-service personnel being convicted in large numbers and for a varying range of offences, but mainly for violence shortly after discharge from service. The independent Monitoring Board referred to in Treadwell's study had already stated that it was concerned about the increasing number of veterans being incarcerated. It appeared to be very critical of the government and Ministry of Defence (MoD), stating 'the preparation of civilian life, both in lifestyle and finances, does not appear to be a major objective of the armed forces ministry. It is very easy to equip a person to kill'; however, a robust form of rehabilitation into the community is sadly lacking upon release.

MacManus and Wessley (2011) reviewed the report by the Howard League for Penal Reform paper that explored why ex-forces personnel end up in prison. The responsibility of the panel was to explore the reasons as to why so many ex-service personnel get involved in criminal activities and the criminal justice system. They were tasked with investigating the problems that this group of individuals face when transitioning from the military back into 'civvy street' and to look at the underlying reasons for their criminal behaviours.

They reiterate that the concerns about how service personnel reintegrate back into society are not a new phenomenon, and how after the end of the Second World War, those returning from the front were considered to be a social problem of the future rather than heroes of the day with the prospects of violence and offending high on the list of concerns. Just as Treadwell had raised concerns over the deployment of UK troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, MacManus and Wessley also explore the deployment of British service personnel both regular and reserve with more than 160,000 deployed to the theatres in Iraq and Afghanistan or in some cases to

both conflicts. They cite concerns raised by the media about the problems facing individuals in their transition back to civilian life surrounding their mental health, housing, employment, relationship breakdowns, substance misuse, violent offending and imprisonment.

MacManus and Wessley (2011) discuss research on the psychological effects of war, noting that it often focuses on clinical outcomes such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. However, they reference American studies indicating a connection between exposure to combat and self-reported aggression, anti-social behaviour, and criminal activity. While there is a general consensus that military experiences relate to these behaviours, the research does not take into account that the military recruits from areas of high social deprivation, which is also associated with higher levels of crime and offending behaviours, as Fossey pointed out in his study.

As previously stated, the military actively targets areas of high deprivation for its recruitment of personnel. These areas are also linked with low aspirational targets and low educational attainment as a result. It is acknowledged by Fossey and Ashcroft that the educational standards set for entrance into the military mean that recruits into the army have a particularly low level of attainment in numeracy and literacy, which is as low as the age of a 7-year-old. It is these issues that MacManus and Wesley say may be responsible for individuals not being able to transition well back into civilian life, leading to their struggles and subsequent deviant and criminal behaviour and that their military experiences may not be responsible.

The findings of the study carried out by the Howard group which included the views of politicians, military leaders, academics and a cohort of 29 service personnel who were in prison for violent offences suggested that there were three interrelated groups of vulnerable individuals which were, those from severely disadvantaged backgrounds who had been involved in criminality prior to them joining the armed forces, those who had faced difficulties whilst serving in the armed forces such as those who had suffered from physical injuries and psychological problems that had led to their early discharge and those who had had successful

careers in the military but had found the transition back into civilian life difficult. These issues were also identified by Fossey and addressed by Ashcroft in his 2014 report. The report by MacManus and Wessley also found that alcohol as well as social exclusion and financial problems, played a big part in their offending. However, the report found insignificant evidence that homelessness was a big problem for this group of people.

The contemporary study conducted by Kwan, MacManus, and Fear (2025) offers a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted factors associated with offending behaviours across three key stages: pre-service, in-service, and post-service. This comprehensive research underscores the complexity of criminality within military contexts, revealing that prior involvement in criminal activities before military service is a significant predictor of subsequent offending behaviours during active service. The findings indicate that demographic factors such as gender, particularly the predisposition towards criminality among male service members, as well as institutional variables including the branch of military service – specifically being in the Army – alongside rank, highlight a concerning trend where lower-ranked personnel are more susceptible to engaging in criminal behaviour while serving. This raises important questions regarding the social and organisational constructs within military environments that may contribute to such deviance. Moreover, the study delves into the correlates of post-service offending, identifying a range of interrelated factors. Notably, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) emerge as crucial variables influencing the trajectory of criminal behaviour following service. The research illustrates that individuals who have encountered significant hardships during their formative years are more likely to engage in criminal activities after their military tenure. Additionally, the presence of a history of prior offending before discharge serves as an alarming indicator, as each recorded offence before leaving service escalates the likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviours post-service. The study emphasises the implications of unplanned discharges – situations where service members exit the military unexpectedly – linking these instances to an increased risk of continued criminality. Particularly, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), who often hold substantial responsibilities and leadership

roles, are highlighted as a demographic more vulnerable to such adverse outcomes. In conclusion, the research conducted by Kwan, MacManus, and Fear illuminates the urgent need for proactive interventions and policy reforms within military frameworks. By addressing the underlying determinants of offending behaviours at each stage of military service, stakeholders can contribute to the cultivation of a safer environment for both service members and the community at large. This study serves as a critical step towards understanding the complexities of criminal behaviour in military contexts and underscores the importance of a holistic approach to prevention and rehabilitation.

Chapter 4

Setting the scene for the study

The nexus between the armed forces and penal institutions is a historical phenomenon that dates back to significant military conflicts such as the American War of Independence and the Napoleonic Wars (Fossey, 2010). During these periods, it was not uncommon for prisoners to be conscripted into military regiments and the Royal Navy (Fossey, 2010, p. 11). He notes that prisons were often cleared to establish new battalions, with individuals, particularly debtors, seizing the opportunity to alleviate their financial obligations and, in some cases, reduce their prison sentences through military enlistment.

In his analysis, Fossey (2010, p. 11) delves into the historical context of coercive recruitment practices, particularly those employed against individuals who were classified as vagrants or who were under the influence of intoxicants. These marginalised groups were often targeted by press gangs – organised groups that actively sought out potential conscripts to fill the ranks of naval and military forces. Such recruitment methods were not merely incidental; they were emblematic of a broader societal tendency to exploit the vulnerabilities of individuals who, due to their socio-economic circumstances or criminal records, found themselves on the fringes of society. Historical precedents reveal that during times of military conflict, particularly in the context of the First World War, there was a notable trend wherein individuals who had been

sentenced to incarceration frequently evaded their sentences by enlisting in the military. This phenomenon reflects a complex interplay between the justice system and military needs, as those who might otherwise have served time found a pathway to service as a means of rehabilitation or escape from punitive measures. Furthermore, this pattern extended beyond the general population to include individuals confined within Borstal institutions – a form of youth detention centre characterised by a focus on education and rehabilitation, along with other similar facilities. Fossey (2010, p. 11) further emphasises that in the contemporary context, an individual's criminal record does not automatically preclude them from joining the armed forces, though the fervour of recruitment has diminished. This shift in policy may suggest a gradual evolution in the perception of individuals who have encountered the criminal justice system, acknowledging their potential for reintegration into society and service. The implications of this are multifaceted, as they invite critical examination of the intersections between crime, punishment, and military service, as well as the societal attitudes toward those who have been involved in criminal activities. Overall, these observations encourage a deeper understanding of the historical and ongoing dynamics of recruitment practices within military contexts and the broader societal implications.

Welfare concern for those who serve.

Concerns regarding the health, well-being, and welfare of individuals who serve – or have served – in the UK armed forces have emerged as a significant priority within both governmental and societal discourse. This emphasis is not merely a reactionary measure but reflects a growing acknowledgement of the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by military personnel, both during and after their service. In his foreword to Fossey (2010), Lord Ramsbottom eloquently articulates this sentiment, underscoring that despite the UK's official status of peace since the conclusion of World War II, the reality is starkly different. He points out that there has been only a single year – 1968 – in which British servicemen and women have not lost their lives in action across the globe. The involvement of the British military in numerous international initiatives since the end of World War II underscores the persistent

nature of these challenges. The UK armed forces have found themselves engaged in a myriad of operations that extend beyond traditional combat scenarios, including peacekeeping missions, humanitarian aid, and support for nations grappling with civil unrest and internal conflicts. These engagements, while often laudable in intent, serve to complicate the lived experiences of service members, as they frequently encounter high-stress situations, exposure to traumatic events, and a range of psychological and physical health issues. Moreover, the implications of these experiences have far-reaching consequences that necessitate a comprehensive examination of the support structures in place for veterans. The transition from active service to civilian life presents a unique set of difficulties, including potential challenges related to mental health, social reintegration, and access to appropriate healthcare services. Notably, the importance of addressing these issues with sensitivity and urgency is integral to fostering a society that not only values the sacrifices made by its servicemen and women but also actively promotes their ongoing welfare and rehabilitation. In this context, it becomes essential to develop targeted strategies that prioritise the reintegration of veterans into civilian life, ensuring they receive adequate support for both their physical and mental health needs. This approach should involve coordinated efforts across government, healthcare systems, and community organisations to create a comprehensive framework of assistance that respects and honours the service of armed forces personnel. Thus, the discourse surrounding military welfare must not only highlight the sacrifices of those who serve but also advocate for ongoing support that promotes resilience, recovery, and a sustainable transition to life after service.

During recent military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, a poignant symbol of national mourning emerged as the population, via the media, witnessed hearses transporting the coffins of servicemen and women, adorned with the Union flag, leaving RAF Brize Norton and subsequently RAF Lyneham. My own military experience includes participation in numerous repatriation flights while serving as a Junior Non-Commissioned Officer (JNCO) in the RAF Police at Royal Air Force Brize Norton. All other activities at the station would cease during

these repatriation flights; the RAF Police were assigned the solemn duty of escorting the fallen colleagues through the main gates of the station, and into the local community of Carterton before the final leg of their journey into Oxford.

Typically, these events drew significant media presence and attention, capturing the return of the fallen to the UK, alongside attendance from various high-ranking officials, including government representatives, military personnel, and other dignitaries all contributed to the atmosphere of the occasion. Such days were invariably marked by a sombre ambience, as the families of the deceased received the bodies of their relatives.

UK Veterans and the criminal justice system

The Royal British Legion (RBL) has highlighted a deficiency in robust research where the experiences of veterans within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in the UK is concerned. This is even more stark when compared against extensive research studies that have been conducted in the US. Although a growing body of literature addressing the intersection of veterans' issues and the CJS has emerged, the RBL (2014) states that there is still a need to conduct further research. There needs to be a more comprehensive understanding of veteran pathways to criminality and incarceration, including any underlying factors that might also contribute to such behaviours. Furthermore, they note that there is a dearth of qualitative research that explores the lived experiences of veterans who are currently or have previously been incarcerated.

The Royal British Legion (2014) highlights a significant issue regarding the absence of standardised data collection processes, which exacerbates the confusion surrounding the actual number of military veterans who are incarcerated within prisons throughout England and Wales. This lack of clarity is not merely an administrative oversight; it represents a critical gap in our understanding of the demographics of the prison population, specifically concerning those who have served in the armed forces. Statistical data referenced by the Royal British

Legion, sourced from the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA), indicates that veterans make up approximately 3.5% of the total prison population. However, this figure is called into question by numerous studies, including those carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, which suggest a far higher representation of veterans among inmates, closer to 7% of the prison population. This discrepancy raises important questions regarding the methodologies employed in data collection and the potential for underreporting or misclassification of veteran status among incarcerated individuals. Compounding this issue is the estimate provided by the National Association of Prison Officers (NAPO) (2008), which posits that the percentage of veterans in prison may, in fact, reach as high as 9%. This estimation translates to approximately 8,500 individuals from the armed forces currently navigating the complexities of the prison system. The implications of these figures warrant serious consideration, as they suggest a notable presence of veterans within a system that is typically ill-equipped to address their unique needs and challenges. In conclusion, the existing statistics indicate a potential underrepresentation of veterans within the criminal justice system due to the lack of standardised data collection. This not only affects the visibility of veterans in the prison population but also limits the ability of policymakers and practitioners to develop informed interventions tailored to the specific circumstances and needs of these individuals. The integration of comprehensive data collection methods is imperative to better understand the intersection of military service and incarceration, ultimately ensuring that the voices and experiences of veterans are adequately recognised and addressed within the criminal justice framework.

Whilst it is estimated that veterans are 30% less likely to be imprisoned in comparison to their civilian counterparts, a trend also observed in the US (Royal British Legion, 2014). The Royal British Legion report highlights specific vulnerabilities within the ex-service community. Exservice specific issues identify areas where preventative interventions could be particularly beneficial for ex-service personnel. In the UK, whilst veterans are imprisoned for a diverse

array of offences, they are more frequently sentenced for violent crimes, sexual offences, and drug-related charges (NACRO, 2025; RBL, 2014; Taylor, 2010).

Recent scholarly discourse has concentrated on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, where UK armed forces have incurred significant casualties, both fatal and non-fatal. These conflicts have garnered extensive attention from media outlets, the public, and governmental bodies alike. There is, therefore, a prevailing assumption that individuals who have experienced combat may encounter adverse health outcomes and diminished well-being, which could potentially correlate with criminal behaviours. This phenomenon has sparked considerable debate regarding the disproportionately high prevalence of veterans within the criminal justice system (CJS).

Statistical analyses suggest that a negligible 1% of veterans currently in the CJS originate from officer ranks, with the remainder primarily drawn from the other ranks. Moreover, data reveals that the majority of veterans entangled in the CJS have served in the Army, with comparatively small contingents from the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Supporting this assertion, research conducted by MacManus and Wood (2017, p. 64) highlights findings from a survey conducted by DASA (2010), which delineates the branches of service among veteran offenders. The survey illustrated that 77% of veteran offenders were from the Army, while 15% were associated with the Royal Navy, and 8% had served in the Royal Air Force.

These proportions appear to underscore a systemic issue within the Army; however, MacManus and Wood also caution against over-reliance on this data, noting its limitations, including the exclusion of certain demographics. Specifically, the data omitted individuals whose service predated 1979 for the Navy, 1972 for the Army, and 1968 for the Air Force. Additionally, the dataset neglected to account for veterans under the age of 18, reservists, and individuals residing in secure psychiatric units. Thus, while the findings illuminate significant trends, they also necessitate further investigation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between military service and subsequent criminality among veterans.

To contextualise this issue there are similar problems that exist with the availability of data of our closest allies in America as discussed by Mumm (2014) in their paper, which states 'statistics are not readily available on how many offenders are veterans or the number of veterans on any given day incarcerated in a city or county jail'. However, she suggests that data drawn from the Bureau of Justice Statistics means that it is possible to say that 1 in 10 of the American prison population has a military background, equating to around 200,000 individuals. She puts this down to the unmet physical and mental health needs of those servicemen and women who have returned home from operations or have left the forces. She talks about the biggest concern for those serving or who have served in the US armed forces as being Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injuries or other Polytrauma.¹⁷ Mumm (2014, p. iii) contends that these issues can lead to 'homelessness, strained relationships, unemployment, and unmet mental health needs'.

MacManus and Wessley (2011)

MacManus and Wessley (2011) *investigated* the prevalence of incarceration among exserving armed forces personnel, as outlined in a report published by the Howard League for Penal Reform. Their research aimed to identify the underlying factors contributing to the increasing involvement of veterans in criminal activities, as well as their subsequent engagement with the Criminal Justice System (CJS). The study focused on the challenges that former military personnel encounter during their transition from military to civilian life, with a focus on the complexities and obstacles that may predispose this demographic to criminal behaviour.

Historically, concerns surrounding the reintegration of returning veterans from the WWII provide a critical lens through which to examine contemporary challenges faced by service

¹⁷ Polytrauma as defined by the US Department of Veteran Affairs as happening when a person experiences injuries to multiple body parts and organ systems often, but not always, as a result of blast-related events. Traumatic Brain Injuries often occur when combined with other disabling injuries such as amputations, burns, spinal cord injury, auditory and visual damage, spinal cord injury (SCI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other medical conditions.

personnel returning from more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In some ways these individuals were viewed not so much as heroes, but as potential societal concerns with a propensity for violent behaviour.

In a related sense, more contemporary research has tended to focus on the psychological ramifications of combat experience, emphasising clinical outcomes such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Notably, (Johnson, 2018; Straud *et al*, 2022)

studies conducted in the US have illustrated a correlation between combat exposure and selfreported instances of aggression, anti-social behaviour, and criminality.

MacManus and Wessley acknowledge that existing research remains one-dimensional, failing to provide a comprehensive understanding of why veterans constitute such a significant cohort within the prison system. Furthermore, they critique the prevailing narrative that attributes criminal behaviour solely to military service, suggesting that this overlooks the reality that military recruitment often targets areas marked by social deprivation. Associations between social deprivation and elevated crime rates is further examined by MacManus and Wessley, indicating that veteran offending behaviour may also be linked to socio-economic factors, as opposed to solely the effects of military service.

The report identifies three intersecting groups of vulnerable individuals: those from disadvantaged backgrounds with a history of criminal involvement prior to their enlistment; those encountering challenges during service; and those struggling to adjust back into civilian life, despite having previously established successful careers. The interconnections between alcohol misuse, financial problems, and criminal behaviour among veterans are also underscored.

In alignment with findings from Fossey (2010), MacManus and Wessley's (2011) report reflects ongoing concerns regarding the mental health of veterans and its implications for criminal behaviour. Such issues have garnered significant attention in recent years, spurred by the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Murrison's report, "Fighting Fit", aimed to address these challenges through the establishment of mental health provisions for both current service members and those who have transitioned out of the military.

Fossey posits that the psychological and social issues affecting veterans may stem from factors encountered before, during, or post-enlistment, potentially arising from family, educational, or broader social contexts. Fossey emphasises that while the experiences of veterans have been widely discussed in media and public discourse, with a predominant focus on PTSD risks resulting from recent combat exposures, most individuals successfully navigate the transition back to civilian life. Nonetheless, there exists a subset of veterans who encounter significant difficulties during this process, echoing MacManus and Wessley's findings. Fossey identifies a specific demographic – single young men with challenges in adapting to change, poor social skills, and limited educational backgrounds – who may have unmet needs during their transition. Additionally, attention is drawn to those with special educational needs (SEN), such as dyslexia and dyscalculia, as well as individuals discharged from military service due to unsuitability or disciplinary breaches, further complicating their reintegration experience.

The concept of "veteran" is delineated by Fossey (2010, p. 6), who draws a comparison between the definitions applicable in the US and the UK. Fossey posits that the parameters for utilising the designation of a veteran in the US necessitate that an individual has completed basic training, served in a theatre of conflict, and has not been dishonourably discharged from military service. In contrast, the definition of a veteran within the UK context is highly contested. Unlike the American framework, the UK definition is not bound by specific time constraints; thus, an individual cannot be stripped of this title, regardless of any infractions during or after

service. Moreover, it is not a prerequisite for a service member in the UK to have served in a combat theatre.

Furthermore, it is important to note that not all individuals transitioning from military service receive equitable support mechanisms. Those who have completed over 16 years of service are entitled to comprehensive transition packages, while those who leave after shorter periods often receive minimal, if any, assistance. Particularly concerning is the treatment of individuals who have served sentences at the Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC) in Colchester, who are excluded from receiving any transition support. This lack of support is significant, as it has been observed that many of these individuals re-offend after their release from military service, highlighting a critical area for intervention and policy reform.

Alcohol and the armed forces

The use of alcohol in the armed forces is also raised by Fossey (2010, p. 10), who argues that alcohol has a long tradition of use and abuse in the armed forces, whether it is saluting senior leaders or the monarch and some regimental ceremonies. The Navy even had rum rations for its sailors throughout history.

Alcohol is affordable, and drinking to excess is generally socially acceptable (and in most cases encouraged) within military environments (Fossey, 2010). Fossey contends that several subgroups are more likely to abuse alcohol than others. For instance, excessive alcohol consumption in the Royal Navy is commonplace, as Henderson et al. (2009) showed that 40% of those who responded to the survey met the criteria for the classification of being a heavy drinker. Whilst 48% reported as binge drinkers at least once a week, and 15% were classified as problem drinkers. Iversen et al. (2007) found that heavy drinking was more likely to be connected to a younger age group and of a lower rank who had poorer overall health and much higher for serving members of the armed forces than their civilian equivalent age groups. 36% of 16-to-19-year-olds in the armed forces consumed dangerous amounts compared to

only 8% of the general populace. However, these statistics differ slightly in comparison to the findings from Buckman et al. (2012), who note that within the 20-to-24-year age group, the rate of dangerous alcohol consumption was 32% for those in the armed forces, compared to 14% of their civilian counterparts. The Buckman et al. study (2012, p. 411) used a sample of $n = 17499$, of which $n = 10272$ responded, which consisted of regulars $n = 8686$ and reservists $n = 1586$. Those still serving amounted to $n = 7766$ and veterans equalled $n = 874$, with 46 missing. There is no comparative data relating to civilians.

It is accepted that younger age groups who leave the military early are at a bigger risk of having or developing mental health issues. This suggests that more research should be undertaken on the harmful levels of alcohol consumption, and the connections – if any – that there might be between it alcohol and offending rates in relation to those that have served in the armed forces. Osborne et al. (2022) conducted a study into military service and alcohol use that identified that military characteristics and experience are associated with high levels of alcohol use among military populations. Additionally, societal and cultural factors contribute to this issue. The predatory behaviour of alcohol establishments, the pressure to conform, the general acceptance of alcohol consumption, and the influence of religious services and military-affiliated social networks all play a role. Excessive drinking can negatively impact both physical and mental health. Individuals diagnosed with PTSD and related symptoms tend to have higher levels of alcohol consumption.

Moorhead (2020)

A decade following Fossey's publication of his seminal report, discourse surrounding the welfare of veterans and associated criminal behaviour continues to be a focal point of scholarly inquiry. Moorhead (2020, p. 64) notes an 'increased focus on military veterans as a distinct population' and emphasises that 'the nature of offending, in conjunction with the mental health concerns prevalent within this group, has dominated extant research.' He acknowledges that whilst increases in research in this area have taken place, there remains a consensus that

further detailed investigation is warranted. Specifically, more research is needed to explore the complex lived experiences of veteran populations more comprehensively.

To construct a nuanced understanding of the veteran offender, it is imperative to consider a variety of contextual factors, including individual characteristics, familial background, educational experiences and influences, and the cultural contexts encountered throughout their lives. Such an understanding could facilitate the mapping of key experiential trajectories within the lives of these individuals, uncovering myriad risk factors and unique needs pertinent to specific situations. Additionally, such a research focus could allow for an examination of the intricate and distinctive lived experiences of veterans in relation to pre-custodial behaviours and criminal justice system experience. In turn, this could provide valuable insights into relationships with alcohol and violence, as well as any educational origins (formal, nonformal or informal) and motivations behind the emergence of such behaviours. Furthermore, qualitative lived-experience-based research could enable participants to engage in reflective and constructive dialogue regarding their experiences, allowing both veterans and the researcher to identify pivotal events that appear to have precipitated their pre-custodial and criminal behaviours.

Existing research re: criminal behaviours and CJE of veterans.

Numerous factors have been explored in attempts to unpick the propensity of individuals, including veterans, to engage in pre-custodial and criminal behaviours. Scholars such as MacManus and Wessley, Fossey, and Moorhead examine the intersections of familial structures, educational attainment, and mental health, particularly in relation to exposure to combat.

Familial Influence on Criminality

The concept of the "broken family", characterised by the absence of one parent, has frequently been utilised by political ideologies to rationalise stricter punitive measures against crime (Slater, 2012). For example, during the lead-up to the 2010 General Election in the UK, aspiring Prime Minister David Cameron repeatedly attributed the phenomenon of "Broken Britain" to single-parent households, arguing that the absence of a moral guide from two parents exacerbated societal disintegration and catalysed criminal behaviour. Furthermore, prevailing conservative assumptions continue to suggest a correlation between familial criminality and the likelihood of offspring replicating such behaviour, indicating a potential intergenerational transmission of delinquency (UK Parliament, 2025).

Indeed, research appears to underscore the significance of family dynamics in shaping a child's likelihood of involvement in criminal activities. Petrosino et al. (2009) highlight that inadequate parental management constitutes a substantial risk factor for subsequent delinquent behaviour. Children reared in less stable environments are purportedly more susceptible to engaging in criminal conduct than those nurtured within loving and supportive families, serving as a protective factor that enhances resilience and creates a barrier against delinquency. Le Blanc (1992) affirms that the relationship between family structure and offending is one of the most thoroughly investigated areas in criminology, elucidating a comprehensive array of familial characteristics associated with delinquent behaviour.

Flanagan et al. (2019, p. 215) highlight a correlation between the importance of parental supervision and the influence that it has on offending. They define parental supervision as referring to a method of child-rearing that emphasises the active involvement of parents in monitoring their children's activities and behaviours. This supervision exists along a continuum. At one end of the spectrum, 'poor' parental supervision is characterised by low levels of parental monitoring and insufficient awareness regarding their children's whereabouts and activities. This inadequate supervision may manifest in the form of either lax rules that fail

to provide necessary guidance or excessively strict rules that unduly restrict the child's autonomy. Conversely, 'effective' parental supervision is typically associated with a range of supportive behaviours that foster healthy communication and ongoing engagement. Such practices include frequent discussions between parents and children, which facilitate the establishment of robust communication channels. Effective supervision enables parents to maintain an informed understanding of their children's activities and whereabouts, while also allowing them to implement a balanced approach to rule-setting – firm yet fair guidelines that encourage responsible behaviour while respecting the child's needs for independence.

Flanagan et al. (2019) conclude that effective parental supervision is linked to lower levels of delinquency, unlike poor parental supervision. This type of supervision involves parents offering adequate informal social control, although the specific level required has not been identified. By fostering strong prosocial bonds and close attachments between parents and children, effective parental supervision serves as a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of offending behaviour.

Educational Attainment and Criminality

Crews (2009) investigates the empirical connections between educational attainment and criminal behaviour, arguing that lower levels of formal educational attainment appear to predispose individuals to delinquency and crime. As noted briefly above, conservative political ideology continues to suggest that a lack of educational qualifications significantly increases the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities. Inevitably, limited educational opportunities often hinder future employment prospects, creating scenarios where individuals are unable to secure viable employment, resort to illegal and criminal activities to support themselves and their families. Furthermore, insufficient educational attainment may also render some individuals vulnerable to exploitation and criminal influences. Research indicates that communities with higher educational levels experience lower crime rates, reflecting a significant relationship between education and societal safety.

The sociological examination of crime as theorised by figures such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Merton, embody a departure from individualistic explanations, attributing criminal behaviour to structural and societal factors rather than individual pathologies. Emile Durkheim's study on suicide (1970) and the concept of "anomie" encompasses the notion of alienation, where individuals feel estranged from their families, communities and societies. Merton (1968) further expands upon Durkheim's earlier work on suicide and anomie with his adaptive work on 'strain theory', which argues that certain social groups, and sub-groups, experience systemic barriers to achieving societal goals, leading individuals to pursue alternative, often criminal, avenues to achieve socio-economic and status objectives (Merton, 1938).

Environment and/or Education

As stated previously in the first chapter, the principal research aim is to make sense of and understand the lived experience of Veterans with pre-custodial behaviours or Criminal Justice Experience (CJE), through the lens of education. The best way to achieve this was to follow the advice of Fossey and MacManus, and Wesley, and talk to the men in-depth, so that they can be explicit about their experiences, and also offer an element of ownership and control within the study. As noted above in chapter 3, this was done by inviting respondents to focus on, and reflecting across, three main periods of their lives: early years, military service, and post-military service. I used a timeline framework to collect initial data; this was then used to explore certain key events in greater detail – by way of an in-depth interview – to gain a better understanding of life course, military service and educational experiences. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to frame the methodological ethos of the research. Within this, all of the respondents utilised the tripartite schema of education as a reflexive lens through which to view other significant events during their lives.

Aligning early years, military service, and post-service experience alongside informal, nonformal and formal education enabled incredibly rich conversations to emerge about culture,

traditions and values, family life, joining the military; and for most of them what their military career meant to them, along with any events and obstacles that might have had a significant impact after leaving the military. Within this, unanimous reference was made to military culture within the army, and in conjunction with this, a distinct lack of structure, meaning that alcohol played a prominent role in all of their lives. The correlation between alcohol and military service was something that I experienced whilst serving in the RAF Police. The annual appraisal that whilst serving, also looked at whether a person “socialises well”, which is a key consideration when being considered for promotion.

To effectively pursue the principal research, aim and its corresponding objectives, I invited participants to articulate their experiences explicitly, and grounded the research relationship with a sense of participant democracy and agency. The cultural, traditional, and value-based lessons derived from their familial backgrounds, as well as their experiences upon enlisting in the military at a young age, were then critically examined regarding their relevance during military service and their long-term effects post-service. Significant attention was afforded to the military culture within which they served and the notable absence of structure that often precipitated the prominence of alcohol.

Chapter 5

Themes

From the emergent themes from the literature review, and the life stories from the Vets that participated as part of this study, it quickly became clear that there was a need to develop a theoretical and conceptual framework to analyse and make sense of the emergent data and themes. An initial cluster of themes started to emerge that suggested a correlation between the established research literature and my emerging data. Themes that relate to social structure, the routine associated with everyday service life, and belonging. Within this context, the next chapter sets out the key theoretical and conceptual aspects that have been selected to help analyse and unpack these themes. A trio of theorists have been selected: Pierre Bourdieu in relation to his theory of habitus; Robert Merton and his work on Strain Theory, and Travis Hirschi's theory of social control. The theoretical framework set out below will then be

used as part of the next data analysis chapter to help scrutinise and inform the wider work and research.

Theoretical Context

The study employs the theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002), Robert Merton (1910 – 2003), and Travis Hirschi (1935 – 2017) to contextualise the experiences of the participants. The purpose of it was to explore different facets of the lives of the participants from differing theoretical viewpoints, incorporating aspects such as the environment in which they grew up, along with education and family, to afford a richer understanding of their circumstances. The theoretical framework will enable not only recognition of the strains experienced on a societal level but also joining the military and becoming part of a very different culture. It will enable a lens that can recognise and scrutinise new requirements to conform as part of this new culture, and all that this entails. Furthermore, the new social controls – or lack of – that they were placed under, and the need for self-control, will also be explored. The theoretical framework of Bourdieu, Merton and Hirschi will enable us to consider and explore the different influences and levels of engagement of family, work, other organisations, and activities that might have reduced their risk of engaging in pre-custodial behaviours or criminal actions.

Bourdieu

Habitus

Costa and Murphy (2015) explore how Pierre Bourdieu created a set of conceptual tools that allow us to think about and make sense of different sociological phenomena, and events such as educational inequality, social and cultural reproduction, social positioning, and mobility within social structures, including those of class and distinction. He developed a collection of relational theories that, when applied, attempted to help us understand, explain, and reveal

inequalities and the specific tastes and identities associated with different social levels and social classes in society.

Arguably, Bourdieu is one of the most influential social theorists of the last century. His theories were grounded in habitus, field, forms of capital and symbolic domination. His work explored the world in which we exist and how that, in turn, dictates the different forms of capital that we accrue and display. His deep-ranging theory also looks at the different educational experiences that we have according to the class that we live in and how we interact with it.

Bourdieu examined the concept of class as lifestyle subdivisions that maintain status through belonging and social closure. In the case of this study, it explores the backgrounds of the participants and the recruitment processes of the military that targets areas of deprivation to fill its lower ranks whilst those who are recruited as officers come mainly from affluent areas.

Bourdieu's work can also be used to explore the idea of social reproduction to maintain the gap between the different classes in military terms, such as the rule of being no fraternisation between the officer classes and those of other ranks. It can also be used to explore the culture of the military and how it maintains the status of officers over the other ranks. How certain behaviours of officers are swept aside and considered as high jinks, whilst behaviours of lower ranks are condemned as being inappropriate.

Bourdieu theorised about the social and cultural differences between the classes. These differences span the opportunities afforded by education, hobbies, and activities as well as those of the family, depending on one's classification and cultural engagement. Those from the lower classes tend to be quite restricted in their cultural and lifestyle choices by wider social class identity and the social system.

Bourdieu presents the idea of different types of capital associated with the classes by which they can be categorised. He identifies the difference in the cultural and social capital of individuals and the environment from which they are derived. For instance, the arts such as

ballet and opera tend to be associated with those from the higher classes, whilst those from the lower classes tend not to be interested in such pursuits. He looks at the provision of education and how those parents who have had a good experience will pass this on to their own children, whilst those who have had a poor experience in their own education may feel inferior and intimidated and unable to support them. It is also suggested by Bourdieu that this type of social reproduction is used to maintain the social mobility gap between the different classes.

Social and cultural capital are derived from habitus; they are the norms associated with our surroundings and where we come from. A person can move from one habitus to another and take on the culture and social norms that are associated with it. Habitus dictates the language used, the social sphere in which we live and normalised behaviours within those areas. The types of language and accents used across all three branches of the armed forces differ, as do notions of acceptable behaviour.¹⁸

There are also different types of classes reinforced throughout the military. The obvious social class division is that between the officers and other ranks; the officer class, especially in the army, is generally derived from private educational establishments that are then trained at Sandhurst. As Green (2022) notes 43% of the 2016/17 intake was from such establishments, and contends that with only 6.4% of pupils being privately educated, it underlines the theory that the officer ranks in the army are disproportionately dominated by the elite classes. However, this is not a new phenomenon, and it has deep links in the history of the British army and its regiments.

Bourdieu also contextualises how social structures tend to reflect where we live, our family, friends and norms dictate where we sit in that societal structure. He also introduces the concept of how those norms affect us in terms of capital (social, culture and finance) as to the

¹⁸ Although Fossey (2011) notes that there is a culture of alcohol consumption across all branches of the military.

language that we use, the past-time and hobbies that we take part in and our own standing in society. The discourse explores how these factors are used to promote social reproduction and maintain the elite's control over other members of society. This is also a factor discussed by Merton as to how this form of social reproduction has implications for us and the behaviour that we adopt and display in life, including criminal behaviour and social mobility through the different classes.

The concepts devised by Bourdieu include capital, field, habitus, doxa and symbolic violence. These concepts have been applied to an extensive variety of fields of social research, affecting a diversity of areas of knowledge. One such area that has really gained prominence over recent years is that of habitus. It is discussed by Costa and Murphy how the conceptualisation of habitus reflects how Bourdieu attempted to navigate the separation of the structure and

agency distinction whilst recognising any external and historical influences that may condition, limit, suppress or possibly stimulate change.

Merton – The reasons why individuals turn to crime.

Merton (1968, p. 211) further developed the concept of strain theory from Emile Durkheim, a French philosopher who explored the reasons for wider social patterns of behaviour in relation to the rapidity of change within industrialising society. Coining the term “anomie” as a state in which social expectations become unclear with the breakdown of traditional social systems, and how this generates feelings of deep despair and worthlessness. Merton studied Durkheim's concept of anomie and the impact that it had on people and adapted this into a theory of structural strain. Just as Durkheim had argued that deviant behaviour occurs when individuals lack the legitimate means to support themselves, Merton suggested that a strain between the goals set by society and those achievable by individuals can affect the way that

they strive for or pursue these. Merton contested that conformity, deviance, or criminal activity were normal responses to strain and anomie.

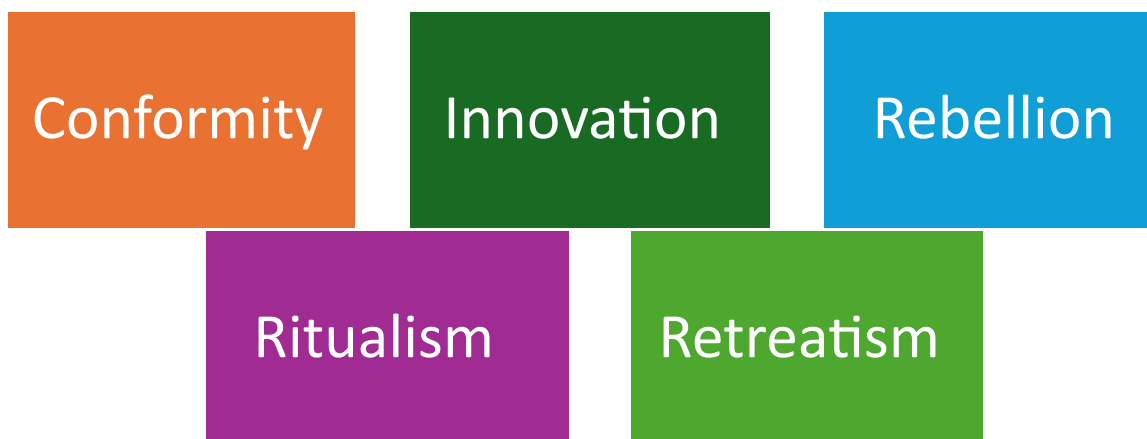
For example, Durkheim's concept of anomie derives from his study on suicide (1970). He contended that the progress from primitive agricultural societies to those based on an industrybased division of labour alienated people from each other. Industrialisation led to the concept that he called anomie, which is described as a state of normlessness, disorder, or confusion in a society where the standard norms and values have become weak or unclear. This and the lack of ethical standards then lead to disconnection, deviance, criminal activity, and social instability among individuals. Durkheim believed that there was a consensus over societal norms and values in modern societies that resulted in social order and the stability of society. He held the belief that this happened because the institutions of society, such as religion and education, were successful in implementing social control. Durkheim suggested that in times where the norms and values had been unclear in society, people became uncertain about how to behave, and that social order would be threatened, and that the behaviour of individuals would not be controlled by the traditional norms and values which then resulted in the feeling of anomie, or normlessness.

Referring to the American Dream, Merton looked at individuals gaining a good education, leading to a good job and materialistic wealth. However, for individuals from certain backgrounds, being excluded from being able to achieve this and in turn being isolated and as a result, turning to crime to support themselves and their families. In Durkheim's case, the development of industrialisation was the trigger of anomie, whereby there were not enough jobs to go around for people to make a living. He identified a breakdown in society from the close-knit society of farming to the breakdown of society due to industrialisation and the division of labour that it brought with it. He argued that primitive agricultural society displayed solidarities whilst a society with increased division of labour made individuals more unfamiliar

to each other and being more dependent upon each other at the same time, meaning no individual could produce a product on their own.

Durkheim believed that society is made up of structures that operate or work together and each of those individual societies has its own structure apart from its individuals. Society was viewed by Durkheim as an organism with many different moving parts that ensured a smooth and methodical running, orderly, operation, and advancement of society.

Merton expanded on Durkheim's concept by explaining the reasons as to why some individuals of a society are more likely to engage in acts of deviance and criminal acts, suggesting that it comes about as a disconnection between the goals that a society sets and the lawful means by which individuals can achieve them. Merton looks at there being different responses to strain as can be seen in diagram 1 below:



Conformity is defined as individuals using legitimate means to follow social goals. Whilst **innovation** is described as individual achieving societal goals through illegitimate ways such as theft. Whilst **ritualism** is those members of society who have given up on ever reaching those goals set by society but still operate within legitimate means. There are those that **retreat** from society and its goals completely and live outside of all social norms. Finally, Merton's looks at those who want to replace the normal societal goals with goals of their own and their own ways with which to achieve them, **rebels**.

Hirschi – The reasons why individuals do not commit crime

Complementing and enhancing Merton's Strain Theory is Travis Hirschi's theory of social control and bonds. He argued that individuals are less likely to participate in criminal if they develop strong connections with their immediate community and society, such as work, family, and education. The theory contends that social bonds promote conformity, shared values, and norms. Hirschi suggested that four social bonds unite people together, which are: attachment; commitment; involvement; and belief. The concept of social control theory was introduced by Hirschi (1969).

Hirschi believed that family bonds of affection are a big deterrent to people committing crime. The stronger the bond is the more likely an individual will take it into account when considering taking part in risks, deviance, or criminal activities. Hirschi's theory of delinquency is built upon notions of social classification, neighbourhood, employment status, the home environment, and educational attainment. If the above positively exist and afford strong bonds within the family, along with constructive relationships with teachers, and if they become employees who are well connected to their workplace and the people that they work with, then they are less likely to engage in negative behaviours. Furthermore, if they engage in altruistic relationships with responsible friends, and participate in clubs and voluntary work, have strong connections to their faith, along with a strong connection to country and national pride, they are even less likely to engage in deviant or criminal acts and behaviours.

The argument set out by Merton relates to the causes of people engaging in deviant behaviour or committing crimes; whereas Hirschi presents the counter-face to this analysis, i.e., what is it that 'stops' the majority of people from committing crimes. He theorised that the more social bonds that an individual has, the less likely they are to commit acts of criminality. He identified four social bonds that bind people together, which are belief, attachment, commitment, and involvement. Hirschi like Merton is influenced by the work of Durkheim, particularly his work on suicide rates during the period of the Industrial Revolution. Durkheim contended that the

better the incorporation of religious, familial, and political groups which an individual is engaged with then the greater their immunity to suicide becomes.

Hirschi's theory offers an inclusive justification as to why individuals choose to comply with social norms, when there might be opportunities or compulsions to engage in criminal behaviours and commit acts of criminality. He stresses the influence that socialisation has on individuals and the ways in which the productive and constructive influence of social bonds can have on the prevention of criminal activity. A major strength of Hirschi's theory is that it is very much compatible with other theories relating to crime (such as rational choice theory). In this sense it can also be used and adapted to complement Bourdieu's theory of habitus and Merton's theory of strain.

Summary

This study will look at habitus, anomie, and strain, along with the societal context of culture in identifying parts of participants experiences and life-courses that might have influenced or restricted them from engaging in risky or deviant behaviours.

The study gives veterans a voice regarding their experiences, who have engaged in precustodial behaviours and subsequently served a custodial sentence after leaving the UK armed forces, and by doing so identify significant events that have happened in their lives. It will examine their lived experiences from their perspective on their early lives and childhood experiences that they may have had, including the area in which they grew up and their educational experiences. It will explore the reasons why they decided to join the armed forces and what influenced their choice of branch and finally, it will investigate events in their lives post-service and the reasons that they feel important as to why they got involved in crime that led to their incarceration.

This will, in turn, link in with the concepts of habitus introduced to us by Bourdieu and how the cultural and social aspects of an individual's life dictate what is deemed as normal or inevitable

within their lives. This is something that France (Costa and Murphy, 2015) discovered when carrying out a study into why youths become entangled in crime and criminal behaviours. France wrote about how crime intersected and linked with the lives of these young people, and the way it became normalised as it occurred every day in their local community. For example, stealing cars is an expression of cultural capital – within a certain habitus – and a way of increasing their status and standing. Furthermore, displays of violence also tend to be linked with a working-class ethos, establishing ‘street’ credibility.

Habitus and the armed forces

In his study, Treadwell (2010) used his experiences as a former probation officer where he encountered many veterans who had ended up in the criminal justice system. He identified that the majority that he had met had come from difficult family backgrounds prior to their enlistment and had become institutionalised into the service and ill-prepared for their return to civilian life upon leaving. He recognised that those routed into the infantry and combat regiments had come from difficult family situations and many had joined from school moving from one institution to another which then made it difficult to return to civilian life. The issues encountered by these individuals as described by Treadwell will have stemmed from their own ecology of coming from areas of high deprivation and low aspirations that resulted in them being unable to gain other types of employment. This then resulted in them having limited social, cultural, or financial capital in accordance with the theories of Bourdieu.

This chimes with Fossey (2010) who notes that the troubles encountered by those leaving the armed forces may not be solely related to their time serving in the military. Instead, like Treadwell, he suggests that their issues could have been the result of family, educational and social experiences or even a combination of them all. He also suggests that issues encountered in formative childhood years may be exacerbated by military service. Their preenlistment and subsequent military service combined impacts upon their post-service lives after leaving the military. The suggestions made by Fossey mirror the findings of Treadwell's

experiences in that he identified that there were issues faced by individuals in their early formative years such as coming from difficult family backgrounds with low aspirational expectations and poor educational attainment, leading to social experiences that they encountered in their ecological space. This is further reinforced by the theories of Bourdieu in that an individual's experiences gained within the sociological environment dictate the behaviours and capital that they demonstrate.

There are a specific group of individuals who are identified as being more at risk by the study carried out by Fossey. They are people whose needs have not been met either by the armed forces or by society in general after they have been discharged from their respective branch of the military. He reveals that the group comprises of single young men who have found it difficult to change and adjust to civilian life, who have a poor social skill set and an inadequate basic education. It is also discussed how these individuals may also suffer from special educational needs (SEN) such as dyslexia and dyscalculia. It is worth noting here that other SEN characteristics such as autism, Asperger's or other educational, behavioural, and neurodevelopmental differences may further influence how students engage with learning environments and support provision."

Treadwell's discourse turns to the number of veterans who leave the armed forces, who then end up homeless and living on the streets. He quotes statistics from the charity Shelter, which estimated that in 1998 there were up to a quarter of all homeless people were from a military background. This is one reason why they commit crimes: they do it to survive, as they have no other access to money due to the situation that they have found themselves in. This concurs with Merton's strain theory, whereby individuals have no other option but to commit a crime, which is a result from societal socioeconomic policies. It is acknowledged in Ashcroft (2014) that those service personnel from the army, in particular, have lower standards of educational attainment due to several reasons, which means that they are not in a position to secure a good level of employment upon their return to civilian life.

A more recent study conducted by Gov.UK (2025) highlights the pressing challenges faced by veterans experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping. The findings indicate that a substantial portion of this demographic has not availed themselves of adequate support systems. Specifically, slightly over 10% (10.8%) of veterans identified as homeless reported receiving assistance from governmental organisations, such as Veterans UK or local council initiatives. This statistic underscores a significant gap in the outreach and efficacy of existing support mechanisms designed to assist this vulnerable population. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that only a marginal 5.7% of veterans facing homelessness utilised charitable resources for housing assistance. While notable organisations such as Citizens Advice, Shelter, and SPACES play a critical role in providing support, the low percentage of engagement suggests that awareness and access to these resources remain severely limited among veterans in need. These findings illuminate an urgent requirement for enhanced strategies to connect homeless veterans with available support services. This emphasises the necessity for both governmental and charitable interventions to alleviate the dire circumstances faced by these individuals and facilitate their reintegration into stable housing situations. Addressing this issue not only benefits the affected individuals but also reinforces society's ethical responsibility to support those who have served in the armed forces.

It is suggested by McManus and Wessley that there is little evidence to support the claim that homelessness was indeed a major issue attributable to the problems experienced by veterans, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Instead, they report that alcohol and substance abuse, social exclusion, as well as financial difficulties, appear to be responsible for veterans committing crimes and subsequently being incarcerated. It is acknowledged by McManus and Wessley that there are some service leavers who do suffer from PTSD, stating between 2% and 7% depending upon their combat role and regular/reserve status. They maintain that the bigger issues are the result of alcohol abuse both during their service and after when they leave.

There is another reason for veterans turning to crime that is also suggested by Treadwell which is for the excitement. He discusses how veterans do it for the thrill and to escape their mundane lives to replicate their experiences whilst serving in the armed forces. This was echoed when I had the opportunity to talk to an ex-Royal Marine who had been convicted of controlling drugs. He stated that he did it for the excitement as well as the financial gains. He discussed how he was used to handling firearms, could handle himself in any situation, and the money was excellent. He told me that he could not find the excitement of his old job in the Marines in any other job that he had done since leaving, and that when he was offered this position, he did not have to think about it.

Socio-economic Origin

Recruitment information held by DASA and produced in a report in 2010 only related to standard demographics such as age, sex, and race, but did not provide information on where the recruit hailed from or their family background. Many of the regiments in the British army have historical regional connections. For instance, the King's Regiment was recruited in the cities of Liverpool and Manchester, and the Queen's Lancashire Regiment and South Lancashire Regiment were recruited from the Lancashire area. These regiments have now been amalgamated into the Duke of Lancaster Regiment who are now based at Dale Barracks in Chester.

Fossey's study refers to three key areas in relation to military recruitment, the first being is that traditional recruiting areas tend to be historically socioeconomically deprived. In this sense, the armed forces offer a route out of socioeconomic deprivation for those that would not normally expect to achieve it. The second is that when the nation's economy is strong and there is high employment, then there are fewer recruits and a limited choice to select from. Alternatively, during an economic slump, there are more potential recruits and a bigger pool from which to select. The third and final point acknowledged by Ashcroft (2014) is that the standard of numeracy and literacy for entry into the army is very low. The Ashcroft (2014)

report was carried out four years after both Treadwell and Fossey confirmed the assumptions made by Fossey, having identified that the minimum requirement for the military is entry level 2, a numeracy and literacy level of that of an eight-year-old. In his report, Ashcroft reported that recruits into the RAF and Royal Navy had no problems with this benchmark; however, those recruited into the army struggled to meet this point.

In summary, the three theories explore different views of crime and the reasons as to why we commit crime and display criminal behaviours, whilst also looking at the reasons that prevent us from taking part in such acts. Habitus, to which Bourdieu referred, is the norms in which we all live, describes each class of society as having its own language, moral codes and activities. This includes the capital, which we all subscribe to, whether that is the cultural, social, or financial. The culture of the armed forces is one of violence, teamwork and being subservient to the superiors (officers). It has its own language and code of ethics as well as honour, and each branch of the services has its own and sticks to it rigidly. There is a lot of competition as to which is the best service, branch, regiment and even battalion. Fossey also makes the point that there is a big a culture of drinking in the armed forces, stating that the consumption of alcohol has always played a part in the armed forces that which is now well documented as causing significant harm both physically and psychologically. It is now known that individuals use alcohol and other substances to mask problems that can then lead to a greater risk of some serious mental health issues.

Meanwhile, Merton discusses how societal goals place strain on groups of individuals who cannot achieve them in a legitimate way such as gaining a good education, which is deemed to be an important facet of being able to secure good employment, therefore gaining the material wealth that is the goal for individuals within society. It is discussed by Ashcroft (2014) how there are a lot of veterans recruited, especially into the army, who have low educational attainment that may ultimately lead to them reintegrating back into civilian life because they cannot secure good employment outside of the military.

Hirschi in contrast to Merton's examines the reasons as to why individuals do not commit crime. When veterans leave the military, they appear to lose the structures that they had whilst serving, they leave with few formal qualifications that are transferable into civilian employment and life. However, they do leave with large amounts of both informal and non-formal education such as good time keeping, self-discipline, leadership, and problem-solving skills. The bonds of attachment that were formed whilst serving in the military are severed, which leads to a lack of commitment to society and its goals; in other words, they have nothing to lose by taking part in criminal activity.

There has been much research carried out into the reasons as to why individuals take part in both criminal behaviour and activities. There are many beliefs that are dependent upon whether your ideology is from the Left or Right of the political continuum. If your thoughts are from the Right then you believe that the act of criminality is the responsibility of the individual, they have choices and have chosen to commit a crime. Alternatively, if you have Left-leaning sympathies one would likely believe that society and its rules play a big part in whether people are forced into crime.

The importance of being educated.

In Treadwell (2010), the report of March 2008 Centre for Policy Studies proposed the 'troops to teacher's' initiative is referred to. It was being suggested that ex-servicemen and women could be retrained as teachers when they had been released from their military service. One of the reasons for this initiative was the intention to improve discipline in schools for young boys who are failing in their education and were deemed to need a male role model. Treadwell argued that this would be beyond any aspirations and capabilities of the majority of armed forces personnel and predicted that the future for many of those individuals would indeed be bleak. He also makes the prophecy that of those individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan will end up in the criminal justice system, with many of them going on to be incarcerated in prison.

Fossey also makes a correlation between the low attainment of individuals joining the armed forces and criminal behaviour and activity. This point is raised by Ashcroft (2014) in which he states that most members of the armed forces are well educated in the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy but suggests that this is not the case within the British Army. Ashcroft acknowledges that there are swathes in the army who have the numeracy and literacy attainment age of an eight-year-old child at key stage 2. This fits in with the concepts of Bourdieu in that this is the strategy of recruiting individuals into infantry regiments from areas of high deprivation with low educational attainment. It is the habitus of those individuals who have been recruited from these areas and is given as a way out of this and developing a different culture and social background.

It is also acknowledged by a Forces in Mind Trust (2024) paper that there is a problem with low educational attainment and specifically in the areas of numeracy and literacy in armed forces recruits that leads to problems in the job market of early service leavers. They are disadvantaged when entering the job market after leaving the armed forces, as they are competing with prospective employees who do hold the relevant qualifications to secure good employment opportunities. It is expressed in the paper that this can then lead to criminality and all that entails including incarceration. This is also supported by Crews (2009), who suggests that the lower a person's educational attainment, the higher the risk of them becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. He also contends that the lack of education and attainment makes an individual more susceptible to being manipulated into taking part in criminal activities. It is also stated by Crews that low educational attainment restricts the employment opportunities for people and leading them into criminal activities.

Fossey also highlights the lack of background checks upon entry to the military, such as for Special Educational Needs issues such as autism, Asperger's, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or any Emotional Behavioural Difficulties that

they may be experiencing. This may involve trauma that they may have suffered in early life, which may be made worse by their military experiences.

When Merton refers to education, he does not differentiate what type of education he means. The biggest emphasis is placed on formal education, the education that takes place in schools, colleges and universities whilst being certified into some qualification or other. Companies demand formal qualifications for the different levels of employment, so GCSE's, A levels, BTECs and degrees that all conform to a curriculum and are quantifiable with a certificate and grade. There is very little acknowledgement of either informal or non-formal education and the importance that this may carry, especially in gaining places on higher education programmes or in good, sustainable employment.

It is Furedi (2009) who asks the question as to 'what is education?' and furthermore 'what is its purpose?'. He makes the argument that it is difficult to debate what it is unless there is some meaningful agreement on the meaning of education itself. He argues that any public debate on education fails to recognise an essential question as to what education is for, and the purpose that it serves. Another question that should also be asked is where education takes place, and should one form be considered to be more important than another. He contends that everybody wants their children to have a good education; however, when the discourse turns to education, the emphasis is on pedagogical approaches, how to deliver them, and what their objectives are. In the society in which we live, operate and educate the main concerns are about how we can motivate individuals to engage in learning. If we fail to do this, and pupils and students do not receive recognised qualifications, what does it mean? Well, according to Merton's strain theory, it could mean that individuals may not be able to meet those societal goals by legitimate means and, in order to survive, turn to criminal acts or behaviours to sustain themselves.

It is accepted by Furedi that education is a personal matter for individuals and that society agrees that everyone is different with their own specific needs and requirements. He argues

that education is a process with which one generation prepares the next in the way of the world. He then states that as humans are born, it is considered that the grown-ups are accountable for preparing them for the world, which they do not know or even understand. This allows the question "How can we educate people for the future when we do not even know what will happen in 10 minutes' time?". Furedi also refers to John Dewey, the renowned American educationalist, who argued that the young people in society cannot be left alone with their own methods and strategies.

Contrary to the thoughts of Furedi, this study contends that education takes place through three different formats, which are formal, informal, and non-formal. It is also accepted that the majority of our learning does not take place in the classroom, in the formal setting, with only approximately 10% being learned in this setting. Most of our learning takes place outside of the formal educational setting within homes, on the streets, with our families and friends, and our engagement with our ecological surroundings. However, so much weight is given to formal qualifications from formal educational institutions, which enable us to gain higher-skilled and remunerated employment positions.

In his paper 'Education and crime', Lochner (2007) refers to the correlation between an individual's education and whether they are likely to be engaged in criminal behaviour and activities. His discourse refers to the negative economic impact of education and differing types of crime, and about schooling increasing the returns from legitimate employment, meaning the higher the educational attainment the better the employment prospects and the greater the material gain as per the conditions highlighted by Merton's strain theory and its conflict with the 'American dream' concepts.

Lochner's paper also suggests a substantial body of literature supporting the connection between wages, unemployment, and criminal behaviour. He refers to the correlation between the rising rates of crime with higher unemployment figures and lower wage rises. He discusses the extent to which education increases wages, whilst reducing the chances of being

unemployed. He also refers to needing time to commit a crime, and if an individual is gainfully employed, then there is little time to commit crimes, in agreement with the thoughts of Hirschi. He looks at the time needed to plan and commit a crime, as well as a possible period of incarceration to consider, which could be very costly for individuals with good employment prospects. He contends that different crimes require differing amounts of time being spent on the planning, preparation, and execution, as well as the chances of capture and incarceration. He differentiates between the time spent on crimes such as burglary, theft and dealing drugs is different to that of violent crimes such as assault and sexual offences, for which there is a higher chance of arrest and conviction.

To contextualise the various aspects addressed by this chapter, along with MacManus and Wessley through to Fossey, lower socioeconomic habitus within the Army tends to incorporate alcohol, drugs, violence and sexual violence and assaults along with PTSD and other mental health issues. However, I would also argue that this very much directs us towards the symptoms than the cause of the problem of pre-custodial and criminal behaviours manifesting with servicemen and women within the Army. Fossey (2010) and MacManus and Wesley (2011) do touch upon this issue. However, there is no depth to their suggestions and no research to support what they have said about education levels, upbringing and their experiences that may have led to their criminality.

The theories of Merton and Hirschi support my hypothesis that there is more to criminal behaviour in relation to conformity and localised societal goals. For example, it is accepted by researchers that leaving the services early is one of the indicators of becoming involved in crime. This also supports the theory that poor education can be an influential factor in facilitating pathways to criminal behaviour. But in themselves, I would suggest that they cannot be considered as the causes of soldiers turning to deviance, crime, and criminality. The ecology and culture of the organisation must be considered, in conjunction with Bourdieu's theory of habitus, to put this into context. For example, when an individual joins the army, they

become part of a culture that has pre-existed for a considerable number of years. To avoid isolation, the recruit must quickly learn to fit into – and accept – that culture, to avoid being shunned. According to Merton's framework, this is a form of conformity, and it is very much expected of an individual due to the nature of the organisation. Such a culture of expectation leaves very little opportunity for innovation or rebellion, as this would cause conflict and lead to punishment and ultimately discharge. If an individual decides that this culture is not to their liking, this leaves them susceptible to the option of retreatism and isolation.

Chapter 6

Methodology and methods

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Introduction to the study

In the previous chapters, the available relevant literature and selected theoretical frameworks have helped develop the focus of the research and put it into context. In this section, the methodology of this research study will be examined, and the reasons for it will be presented. It will begin with the provision of a framework and an explanation of how the study is methodologically framed. This will be to establish the ontological position of the study and the important process of obtaining and recording the experiences of veterans in relation to education prior to enlistment, during their service, post-service, up to their intervention or incarceration and beyond¹⁹. Informed by an interpretivist approach, so as to prioritise and

¹⁹ The study will be exploring experiences of the three acknowledged strands of education, **formal** which is defined as a structured and systematic form of learning (schools, colleges, and universities) that must meet certain set criteria laid down by organisations, in the case of the UK, the part of government which is responsible for this is the Department for Education. **Non-formal** is education that sits outside of formal education it is planned and organised by a provider and is intended to serve particular learning objectives. The intention of informal education may be to provide additional, alternative, or compliment formal education but does not lead to a formal qualification. It may take the form of workshops, seminars, and short courses. It is also deemed to be part of the lifelong learning process. The final strand being that of **Informal**, which is not structured, graded, or certified, but it can complement formal education and lifelong learning. It is considered to be unprompted, heuristic, and motivated by an individual's family, friends and ecology. Instances of informal education are learning to ride a bicycle, count money whilst shopping, it can also help people attain skills, values, and attitudes from everyday activities and dealings that they may have.

collect data from the personal and various viewpoints of the participating veterans, sense is made of their life experiences by collecting their responses using a guiding grid (this can be seen in Appendix A).

The study supports and enables the participation and comprehension of the participating veterans, and how they interpret their lives, the various stages of their education and understandings of influential events that led them to being incarcerated. It will also reflect upon

the personal bias of the researcher and his own experiences as both a civilian and Royal Air Force Police officer. Using a phenomenological thematic approach (in the form of interpretive phenomenological analysis – IPA), the chapter will give voice to authentic life experiences and provide invaluable insights and understandings of obstacles, challenges and potential solutions for the future.

Being a qualitative research study, the project will explore the educational experiences of veterans who have experience of engaging pre-custodial behaviours followed by a period of incarceration. Having read and considered the existing research and literature available on veterans, there is a gap in the knowledge in relation to ‘lived experience’. It is envisaged, therefore, that this research will go some way to fill that gap and offer a broader understanding of those experiences. The study will look not just at the time they spent in the military but also the influence of their formative years such as informal and non-formal structures associated with education, family, friends and peers, but will also consider their involvement in wider and formal organisational systems, and how the combination of these influences has impacted their lives, choices and opportunities. It will also investigate perceptions in relation to key experiences that they think may have resulted in their risk-taking behaviours or being sent to prison.

Research methodology.

Here, I discuss the philosophy of the research study and the methods used to collect the data. Research philosophy is a reference to the system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge, (Hothersall, 2025). Hothersall highlights that whenever any research is undertaken, the role and intentions of the researcher must be considered whilst developing knowledge, and points out that researchers, without necessarily being conscious of the fact, make assumptions about what – and how – to study their phenomenon.

The ontological (realism or relativism),²⁰ epistemological (positivism, post-positivism – interpretivism, constructivism),²⁰ and axiological (personal bias)²¹ positions of the researcher have therefore dictated the shape and direction of the study. The position that I have adopted means that there are a number of complex issues that will present themselves, such as family, education, crime, and deprivation, as well as their military experiences and whether that has been impacted by their other pre-service events. The research will highlight some, if not all of those mentioned above through an interpretivist / constructivist approach, and will piece together a number of elements to give an insight as to how the participants think, and how they believe that their experiences led them into their current situation.

Such assumptions incorporate epistemological and ontological decisions, relating to the types of knowledge to be encountered and generated as a result of the research process, along with the degree to which our own values might have influenced the research process (personal

²⁰ In the case of this study, it is expected to find a number of answers on their own or in a combination that will allow me to interpret what the participants are saying and to analyse this in order to construct a theory as to why servicemen and women have found themselves in prison after leaving the armed forces. There are also several assumptions that can be made about their family background, education, and early contact with crime as well as the impact that their service has had on them. It is also assumed that the individuals in question have struggled to resettle back into civilian life.

²¹ The acknowledgement of my own personal experiences as a Cheshire Police and RAF Police officer are important in this study due to the experiences that I have had in the military and working with all three branches. I have lived within that group of individuals, learned the language and been immersed in the culture.

bias) (Crotty, 1998).²² It is contended by Crotty that such assumptions inexorably inform the wider understanding of the research questions, the methods used and how the subsequent findings are interpreted. Clough and Nutbrown (2002) note how methodological processes are

²⁰ There are two approaches from ontology which are scientific (realist) or social (relativist) which indicate a scientific, single answer to a set problem or social based study whereby there may be more than one answer to the set question.

utilised for the purposes of shaping the rationale for the selection of methods and the production of the subsequent knowledge. For this study, an interpretive phenomenological framework has been selected along with the use of timelines and semi-structured interviews to ensure a rich and deep data collection.

As a researcher, it is important that I make known the unknown through a research lens that will enable people to encounter a richer understanding of the topic. By acknowledging this, several assumptions need to be addressed that I have invoked as part of this study. Notably, my own personal military experience (having served as both an RAF and civilian Police officer).²³ It is anticipated that the majority of veterans incarcerated in the UK prison system will have served in the army branch of military organisations (Ashcroft, 2014; Phillips, 2014), specifically the infantry regiments. Also likely, they will have joined the army to escape unemployment, family, or crime. This demographic generally has low educational attainment or may not have even completed their schooling. They may have faced disciplinary issues whilst in the army, and as a consequence, left the service voluntarily or were administratively dismissed. They will normally have held a low rank and failed to progress in their military

²² Epistemological assumptions are centred around whether there is more than one answer that can explain a phenomenon (positivist) or whether there may be multiple answers (realism). As this is a sociological study it is envisaged that there will be more than one outcome to the research study questions. Ontological assumptions denote how this knowledge exists and where the participants have gained this knowledge which tends to be subjective. Axiological assumptions are based on the knowledge perceived or otherwise of the researcher and how my own experiences can influence the research study. These personal biases have to be acknowledged and mitigated in the research process.

²³ This is discussed in detail below – see pages 16-20.

career. Finally, they are most likely to have been identified as displaying particular types of pre-custodial behaviours and being sentenced to a period of imprisonment for acts of violence, sexual assault, or rape or more recently for drug offences (Ashcroft, 2014; Phillips, 2014).

The experiences that I have had as both a civilian and RAF (military) Police officer illustrate that army personnel tend to be treated less favourably than their Royal Navy and RAF counterparts. This may be due to those branches being more technical services and therefore a higher degree of educational attainment is required to fulfil those roles. In relation to this, there appears to be a contradiction in Ashcroft's (2014) report on the transition of service personnel back into "civvy street", as it states that all members of the UK armed forces are well educated. It also states that most entrants to the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force are

educated to level 2 and above in literacy and numeracy, whilst only a small percentage of those in the army reach that level. It is accepted that to gain promotion in the army, personnel must achieve level 2 by the time that they are being considered for promotion to SNCO and above.

Education is constantly promoted in the RAF, with numerous courses being made available through the base or unit education centres. There tend to be regular reminders of the funding available not only for local courses but also through colleges and universities to enhance professional development. In-house training courses are also available, which are compatible with civil qualifications such as NVQ, BTEC, City and Guilds Air Transport Security (ATSy), Counterintelligence (CI) and Special Investigation (SI) courses. However, this did not / does not seem to apply in the same way to soldiers in the army²⁴.

²⁴ Anecdotal evidence from an education officer of an army barracks confirmed this with me when she approached the soldiers about the services and courses available at the garrison education centre and their reply was that they thought that the provision was for officers only and not for them as other ranks (low ranking soldiers).

There is a dominant culture of drinking alcohol that underpins service life across all three branches. There are numerous dining-in nights, relating to promotions, birthdays, leaving and service events such as celebrating the Battle of Britain that are celebrated with gusto and pride. The other services also celebrate such occasions as Trafalgar Day in the Royal Navy and the many victorious battles fought by the various regiments of the British Army. There are summer balls and winter balls for all ranks in the three branches of the armed forces. Once again, the army seems to do this very differently from the other two services, whereby the different ranks rarely mix with each other and a distinct boundary is maintained between the three social classes of the Junior Ranks (JR), Junior non-commissioned officers (JNCO), Senior Non-commissioned officers (SNCO), and commissioned officers. There is also lots of down time where troops are not on detachment or exercise, as a result, they end up engaging

in mundane day-to-day routine tasks such as guard duty, and maintaining equipment, whether that is weapons systems or vehicles and fitness.

The study

Individuals who are serving – or have served – in the UK armed forces are unique, as the kind of jobs that they are asked to do mean that it is no ordinary profession. The UK armed forces participate in many different aspects of life, and although they exist primarily for the defence of the country, they also take part in humanitarian missions around the world, peacekeeping in diverse theatres as well as protecting us from aggressors in whatever form that it may take. Recent examples include theatres in Iraq, Afghanistan or providing security in Britain and Northern Ireland. Military personnel in the UK armed forces are likely to have been subjected to violence by enemy forces, watched friends die in the most horrific ways, whilst also helping

domestically, demonstrated recently with their assistance in the pandemic.²⁵ However, the statistics show that a relatively high number of those who leave the armed forces are likely to encounter the criminal justice system. Veterans form the largest comparative cohort of any professional group incarcerated in UK prisons.

In view of this, I will highlight the potential of researcher bias (and my own experiences within the police and military that led to my interest in this area of research – see pages 16-20 above). I will explore the ethical implications for the study and any obstacles that this may present, such as welfare, safety of both participants and myself, plus any support that may be required for all participants.

To address this the section will be divided into the following four sub-divisions.

-
- Methodological approach: These are the reasons as to why Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was considered to be the most appropriate method for this study. It will also discuss how the researcher's own bias and experiences may affect the research being conducted.
 - Methods: In this section, the context of the study will be discussed as well as the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of participants. It will also look at how participants are recruited and how the strategy size was derived at. Also discussed is how the data will be collected, recordings and transcriptions and how this data will be analysed to obtain results.

²⁵ UK armed forces personnel are currently or have recently been engaged in anti – poaching initiatives in Kenya, Anti-drugs patrols in the Caribbean., as well as being deployed to drive tankers in the recent fuel delivery problems, as well as other operations to assist the general public in the UK and around the world.

- The role (and prior experience) of the researcher: Particular attention will be paid to the prospect of any pre-conceived ideas on the part of the researcher and how I will attempt to mitigate them as part of the data collection and its interpretation.
- Ethics: In this section, the ethical considerations have been explored to ensure autonomy, benevolence, non-maleficence, compliance, and justness of the research study.

Methodological approach

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

I decided from the outset that due to the nature of the study, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) would be the most appropriate framework to inform and contextualise the methodology, as a result of my own experiences as an ex-serviceman and to effectively situate the methods and codify and interpret the data, which is based on subjective reflections.

IPA was first identified or expressed by Jonathan Smith in the UK during the 1990s, Smith is considered the father of this method. It was originally used as a method to explore 'the psychology of experience in health and clinical/counselling psychology' (Eatough and Smith, 2017, p. 1). Since the conception of this method in the 90s by Jonathon Smith as a tool used to explore psychology, it has widened its scope to include organisational studies, education, sports science, and the humanities. In fact, Eatough and Smith (2017, p. 1) now claim, 'it is now one of the best-established qualitative approaches in the UK'. IPA was described by Eatough and Smith (2017, p. 1) as being 'concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experiences'. Although it is related to several other forms of phenomenological psychology approaches which all differentiate from each other in their theoretical motivation and methodological obligations, but they are all broadly aligned to the importance of an experiential viewpoint.

I consider IPA to be the ideal method for this study as it was specifically developed for the purposes of rigorous exploration of subjective experiences and social cognitions, as highlighted by Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008). The approach is also underpinned theoretically by Husserl's attempt to construct a philosophical science of conscience. Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is described by Eatough and Smith (2017, p. 3) as:

The phenomenological intention is to describe how the world is formed and experienced through consciousness. This intention is often understood as a 'stripping away of our preconceptions and biases (such as those from science, tradition, common sense), exposing the taken for granted and revealing the essence of the phenomenon whilst transcending the contextual and person.'

To put this into context, this study explores the journeys of the veterans towards and including their pre-custodial behaviours or incarceration, within a context of educational progression. It looks at the uniqueness and similarities of each of the participants' journeys in order to identify themes that may exist.

Rigour

It was the German philosopher Martin Heidegger who introduced the idea of 'being' and what it meant to us. He suggested that instead of us being detached from life, it is determined by us being there and experiencing those events. One of his most famous analogies is of a man using a hammer, he suggested that if the person is competent in its use, he has no need to think about what he is doing with it and uses it unconsciously without thought (Law, 2007).

This sums up the problems that we face as researchers and especially in qualitative research, which is our own experiences and alignment will bring unavoidable influences. As a veteran myself, carrying out this research study, it is impossible to have a truly objective position. This type of research (heuristic) is explicit upon the reliance of the experiences of the researcher.

Therefore, in this section I will be writing about my own personal experiences as a former member of the UK armed forces and as both a civilian and Royal Air Force Police officer.

It is particularly important for me to acknowledge my own experiences and to accept reflectivity in my research for me to negate or avoid any bias in the interpretation of the data collected.

Rationale and support for the use of IPA

IPA will be used to identify and develop the themes and events that arise from each individual respondent. This, in turn, will allow for the identification and exploration of common themes across the cohort with regard to the three strands of education.

As the facilitator of the study, I aim to afford each participant an authentic voice to express their thoughts and feelings and to reflect upon them. It is argued by Marvasti (2004, p. 1) that social life is full of experiences that prompt people to re-examine their lives. He uses the example of an individual trying to make sense of 'an unpleasant' experience that they have had by reflecting upon it. He discusses the many ways that people interpret, give meaning to, and predict the social world through their experiences.

The assumption is also made that, as people, we are interested in understanding and explaining our everyday experiences. The questions asked are, of course, largely dependent upon the researcher's orientation. However, the perceptions that emerge from the participants in relation to their experiences and timelines highlighting specific events that are important and meaningful for them. It is envisaged that this collaboration will also inform the questions and the interviews and enable the democratic exploration of events and perceptions in greater personal depth.

Bourdieu: Reflexivity and the social construction of criminal behaviour of veterans

Using Bourdieu's concepts and theories of critical sociology, the study attempts to analyse and bridge the gap between subjectivity and objectivity whilst under the constraints of the social world in which we live (Jenkins, 2002, cited in Costa and Murphy, 2015). It was Marvesti who suggested that as humans, we are interested in understanding events and the actions that we encounter in our everyday lives and that have led us to where we are. Alternatively, the objective world is seen as that which is beyond the influence of a solitary individual through factors such as social, economic, cultural, institutional and structures of power.

As we see below, the theory of habitus relates to our background, such as the area that we come from, and how we interact with various ecologies; these all combine to dictate our social and cultural capitals. It is expected that some, if not all, of these areas will become apparent during the study as participants express their thoughts and perceptions of life experience.

As I reflect upon my own experiences as a Police officer, there is often no thought given as to why an individual commits a criminal act. There are no grey areas; an individual has either committed a crime, in which case they are arrested, or they have not. As an officer on a drugs team at 04:00 on a cold, wet, Monday morning, waiting to execute a drugs warrant in a deprived area of a town (which now lies within the Liverpool City Region), there was no consideration given as to why the target was involved in the drugs supply chain. The only thought that went through our minds was that we are taking a criminal off the streets and to make it a safer place.

Deviant and/or criminal behaviour in the military attracts different perceptions; this isn't to say that it is trivialised but rather seen differently. Alcohol and fighting go hand in hand in the armed forces; comments made anecdotally by senior officers support this theory. It is also a breeding ground for sexual excess, harassment, violence, (and unfortunately rape, which has been

widely reported in the media and discussed at a higher level in both the military and government). The findings of both Ashcroft and Phillips highlight the prevalence of offences that service personnel and veterans tend to be arrested for; they are most commonly offences against the person (assault) and sexual. There are other offences such as acquisition (theft), but by far the greatest number are assault and sexual, statistically far greater when compared to offences by civilian counterparts.

Research carried out by France, cited in Costa and Murphy, (2015, p. 74) into youth crime and the pathways taken by young people utilises Bourdieu's concept of habitus. There has been much research that centres around individuals committing crimes and the types of crimes committed. The conundrum regarding how to deal with criminals, whether to punish or rehabilitate them, always arises when crime and criminality is discussed. It is noted by France that individualistic approaches tend to dominate the study of crime, and that other aspects, such as the social ecological influences, tend to be neglected. This is why the decision was taken to utilise the concept of habitus as part of the study. So that questions can be asked and considered in relation to family, education and background, had whether low educational attainment influenced participants' behaviours. Habitus also allows for the creation of a framework that extends beyond numerical data to explore the experiences that the veterans feel played a role in their behaviours and actions.

I do not expect to find the main reasons to be about status or "street cred", but I do anticipate that notions of pride and struggles to fit back into society will be identified. Also, the military culture of drinking and fighting is likely to flow over into the return to civilian life, as well as problematic shifts in personal identity. Of course, leaving the armed forces may not have been of their own choosing but forced upon them by disciplinary measures or even injury. The perception of failure due to whatever injuries may have been received during their service also comes with guilt and the feeling of being let down. There may also be financial reasons for

their behaviour or trying to recreate the excitement that they had whilst serving in theatres of conflict or humanitarian missions.

The use of IPA will allow for the identification and extrapolation of significant events from both their reflections, which may be informed by the concepts of social, cultural, and financial capital, along with their motives and reasons for committing crime. It is envisaged that the data analysis and discussion chapter will either support or refute many – or potentially all – of the assumptions made here.

Methods

In this section, I will discuss the methods applied for the collection of data in this study and explain and justify the rationale for the choice of those methods. I will provide clarification and justification for the inclusion and exclusion criteria of participants, along with details relating to the recruitment process and how participants were chosen. This section also discusses and explains how the methods were designed and implemented – and the extent to which they were successful.

Inspiration behind the study

The inspiration behind this study came from working in the capacity of research assistant in the Westminster Centre for Research and Innovation in Veterans' Wellbeing at the University of Chester. The research conducted by the centre focused primarily on the welfare of veterans and their families. It also focused on aspects of physical and psychological health, engagement with primary care services and how healthcare professionals interact with those veterans. The latter involved the design and delivery of a new pre-registration degree module onto the nursing degree programme. The aim of this new module was to enable newly qualified nurses to understand the distinct needs and support of veterans.

Whilst I was in this role, I was tasked with organising and running several veterans-related events, symposiums, seminars, and workshops both for the university and external partners such as the Royal British Legion (RBL). It was during the organising of one such event that I first met members of Her Majesty's Prison Service, who were evidently interested in what we were doing at the University, and how we might help them deal with the increasing numbers of veterans being incarcerated. I was subsequently invited to a local prison, and it was from these conversations with both prison officers and prisoners that prompted the basis of this study.

It was during my visits to the prison and further discussions with the HMPS staff that several issues were raised. The veterans in custody support officers (VICSO's) were concerned that they were having problems identifying veterans and how to prevent impostors claiming to be veterans from gaining access to the extra support and benefits available for Vets. This was also a major concern for Vets incarcerated in the community. As the prison was a 'new build', it was possible to create a specific veteran's community. This allowed enhanced support provision using external agencies such as Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen's, Family Association (SSAFA) and the RBL, along with dedicated staff to support veterans on their arrival. Additional support could also be provided during incarceration and upon their subsequent release and reintegration back into the community. It appeared that the older prison estates did not have the capacity to develop and implement this service.

Military-specific issues

During hostilities in Iraq and Afghanistan, there were numerous concerns raised about the welfare of members of the armed forces. There were complaints that the troops on the ground did not have the correct resources for involvement in these conflicts, and especially for their health and wellbeing, including mental health issues, and other issues such as the high numbers of homelessness amongst those veterans who had left the armed forces were also

raised. These concerns were highlighted in the media, such as the press, on television, discussed on the streets and debated in parliament. However, it was Treadwell (2010) and Fossey (2010) who brought the issue of the rising number of veterans being incarcerated in UK prisons to the fore. In fact, the discourse of Treadwell was on how the victims of the battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan, although tragic, would not be the last ones. He contested that the real victims would be the ones who would suffer at the hands of the returning servicemen and women from these conflicts in the future.

The study by Fossey provides a good starting point and supports the approach taken by this study with the identification of how several social and psychological factors may influence how veterans reintegrate back into society. It is argued that these factors may have occurred before individuals started their service in the military, factors identified by Fossey could be related to their backgrounds such as previous family, education, or their social experiences that they have had. The study by Fossey also identified a specific group of individuals deemed to be more at risk whose requirements have not been met whilst serving in the armed forces or by society after their discharge. The group consists of single young males, who have had difficulties adjusting to change, with inferior social skills, poor educational attainment levels and possibly conditions that may affect such factors such as dyslexia or ADHD/ADD and autism.

There are issues regarding the lack of understanding of the backgrounds of recruits joining the armed forces and any adverse impact that military service may have on them later in their lives and specifically after leaving the forces (Fossey, 2011). There are no definitive figures regarding the backgrounds of individuals who are recruited into the forces; however, it is accepted that areas of high deprivation are the main centres from which individuals join the armed forces and in particular the army. It is also accepted that areas of high social deprivation are associated with instances of low academic attainment and high levels of anti-social

behaviour and crime. A study carried out by Houchin (2005) conducted in Scotland, determined that criminal offending behaviour in these areas of deprivation is thought to be normal.

As a result of the publicity raised, the government requested that a study into these concerns be carried out and the resultant Ashcroft (2014) report was released on a number of issues regarding service leavers and how they transitioned back into 'civvy street'. The report concluded that most service leavers returned to civilian life with relatively few issues and went on to have successful careers after their military service. He also noted that a minority struggle to adapt to life outside of the military and resort to problematic or criminal behaviours and get caught up in the criminal justice system (CJS).

Philips' (2014) report was released in the same year as Ashcroft's study and was specifically tasked with exploring the number of veterans within the CJS. Its main findings were that the main offences committed by veterans were those of a violent nature, which was in stark contrast to largely acquisition offences for civilian counterparts. A report by Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons (2014) confirmed Phillips' findings, showing that 32.9% of veterans compared to 28.7% of their civilian counterparts, had been convicted of violent offences. There was also a significant disparity for sexual offences, indicating that 24.7% of veterans had been convicted under this category in comparison to only 10.9% of their civilian counterparts. Exact figures on the number of veterans serving custodial sentences is up for debate and ranges from government figures of 3% up to an independent research study carried out in Dartmoor by the Ministry of Justice in conjunction with service charities conducted a study cited in RBL (2014a & 2014b); Treadwell (2010), which suggested the findings indicated that approximately 16.75% of those surveyed had engaged in military service, a significant figure that highlights the intersection between military service and subsequent criminal behaviour. In a complementary exploration of this demographic, the voluntary organisation Veterans in Prisons conducted a survey across ten different prisons, identifying a total of 118 individuals with prior service in the Royal Navy or British Army. This figure emerged from a total prison

population of 1191 inmates. When extrapolated, these figures suggest that roughly 9.1% of the incarcerated population may consist of individuals who previously served in the armed forces (Napo, 2008). The implications of these statistics are profound, as they underscore the necessity for effective estimations regarding the number of ex-service personnel currently serving prison sentences. In light of these statistics, it becomes increasingly evident that rigorous and authoritative research aimed at accurately establishing the prevalence of exarmed forces personnel within the criminal justice system is not only necessary but arguably overdue. However, a critical examination of this issue requires a nuanced approach that transcends merely treating the question as a quantitative counting exercise. Reducing the complex realities of ex-forces personnel in custody to mere statistics risks ignoring the multifaceted factors and experiences that contribute to the intersection of military service and incarceration. These may include issues related to mental health, the impact of combat experiences, socioeconomic factors, and the challenges of reintegration into civilian life. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of ex-armed forces personnel within the prison system must encompass qualitative research that delves into the lived experiences, challenges, and support needs of this unique population. This holistic approach is essential for informing policy decisions, developing targeted interventions, and ultimately enhancing the rehabilitation prospects for ex-service members who find themselves entangled in the criminal justice system. The quantitative studies highlighted above show the number of veterans in prison and for what offences the majority are there for. What they do not give is an insight as to what caused these men and women to commit such offences. We do not have detailed sociological or ecological perspectives that enter into and attempt to explain the experiences of these individuals and what led them to turn to crime. Established quantitative data does not tell us about the backgrounds of the veterans concerned or why they joined the military. It does not disclose the experiences that they had whilst serving in the military or why they left, nor do we know what happened to them after leaving.

Inclusion criteria for this study

For individuals to have been considered for participation in the study, they must:

- Be a willing participant.
- Be supported by veterans' organisations in the Merseyside / Liverpool City Region area.
- Have served in the UK armed forces both regular and reserve (RAF, RN, Army).
- Male.
- Be above the age of 21.
- To have engaged in (and been subjected to an intervention) for pre-custodial behaviour/s; or
- To have served their first custodial sentence.
- If experienced custody, to have served a sentence between 6 months and up to 2 years.

Rationale for inclusion of participation criteria

The participants for this study were selected from cohorts receiving support through the Veterans HQ hub in Liverpool and Tom Harrison House in the Anfield area of Liverpool. All participants met the inclusion criteria laid out above.

The selection of participants from these organisations in the Merseyside / Liverpool City Region was made due to several logistical reasons, i.e., costs related to travelling to other areas; logistical constraints in contacting and fostering relations with other organisations further afield. Also, that access to, and support for, participants in other areas might be difficult, as could the identification of suitable premises in which to conduct the interviews. There was also the matter of time constraints (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). The Veterans HQ team and those from Tom Harrison House were supportive of the study from the outset and offered to support the participants in this study.

Most of the veterans who have been subjected to interventions or incarcerated in UK prisons are male with only a small minority being female. Logistically, it would have been too timeconsuming and costly to attempt to target and recruit female veterans who met the

inclusion criteria. Nevertheless, as more females take up frontline roles within the armed forces, this might be considered as a standalone research study in the future.

The rationale for choosing participants who are 21 and over is in some way due to the statistics produced by HM Government and the MoD (formerly known as the Defence Analytical Services and Advice). In 2010 they reported that the age of veteran offenders is higher than civilian counterparts at between 45 and 54 years of age. Although individuals can join the military at the age of 16, they cannot be sent into areas of conflict until they are 18 years of age (the years in between 16 and 18 are referred to as 'years for the queen' and are not classed as pensionable service). Individuals under the age of 21 would also likely be placed into a different category of prison for younger offenders or a Young Offenders Institute, where enhanced supervision and safeguarding principles are applied.

If the research into veterans' offences is correct, then most of the veterans receiving custodial sentences had committed schedule 15 offences (assault, rape, and sexual offences). These types of offences cover an expansive span of severity that can result in both long- and shortterm custodial sentences being given. The statistics produced for the Ministry of Justice (2020) show that individuals who have been sentenced for such offences are that of those who receive a > 4 years sentence, 46% will re-offend within the first year of completion of their sentence. The figures also show that offenders will be older and have committed fewer previous offences²⁶.

Sample size.

There are no hard and fast rules regarding the size of the sample in a qualitative study. This is highlighted by Patton (2015, p. 169), who suggests that this is one of the main differences between quantitative studies, which are necessarily reliant upon large sample groups,

²⁶ The completion of a sentence may be that they have finished their custodial sentence and released from prison or finished the licence period having been released from prison. It may also mean the completion of any probation or community payback period.

whereas qualitative studies that focus on smaller sample sizes to ensure a depth and richness in data. This is also confirmed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), who agree that there is

no definitive answer as to the size of the sample in this type of study and that single case studies can be just as powerful. However, they suggest that an ideal number of participants is usually around eight but acknowledge that this is dependent on the focus and remit of the study.

This study sought to recruit between 8 and 10 participants as a sufficient qualitative sample size. Veterans Hubs and support centres were then contacted with information regarding the study and explained what their role would be in the recruitment and support of participants. Veterans Hubs such as the Veterans HQ in Liverpool give support to veterans on a wide range of issues such as employment, housing and benefits and are actively involved in the support of prisoners in and leaving HMP Liverpool and HMP Altcourse. Tom Harrison House in Liverpool also provides support for those veterans with addictions and the issues that may come with them.

Participants who met the selection criteria and who expressed an interest in taking part in the study were chosen on a first-come basis; the idea being that once the ideal number of participants had been reached, a reserve list would be put in place in case any dropped out. Those selected were contacted by phone and email to arrange the first meeting. At this point, they were provided with participation information sheets that clarified the purpose and remit of the research, what it hoped to achieve, along with the expectations for their engagement.

The intention was to recruit between 8-10 participants; however, recruitment and retention for the study proved to be an issue (even with the assistance received from Veterans HQ and Tom Harrison House). The study numbers were therefore revised down to 6 participants to ensure that there would still be enough to produce the depth of data required. Initially, the study had

nine participants with $n = 3$ dropping out with all 3 stating time limitations as an issue, this was despite being provided with information regarding the amount of time and number of sessions required to participate. One individual stated that they thought that it would be completed over one interview session. After the three had dropped out, there were $n = 6$ participants who continued with their participation in the study. Details of the 6 participants can be seen below.

The participants

The Vets who took part in this study identified themselves as having served in the British army as either regulars or reservists. They had served between 4-and-16-years of military service and had left service for a variety of reasons from taking redundancy to being discharged due to having committed criminal offences; others had voluntarily applied to leave to take up other careers (PVR). They had all (except for the participant in the pilot study) engaged in precustodial behaviours or criminal behaviours and a period of incarceration for varying amounts of time, from short sentences to longer ones.

To thoroughly contextualise this study, it is essential to consider the perspectives and insights of individuals occupying leadership roles within the military. Such leaders not only possess extensive operational experience but also offer invaluable reflections that can inform our understanding of military dynamics and the necessary support systems for personnel. Squadron Leader Bryce exemplifies this depth of experience, having dedicated 33 years of service to the Royal Air Force (RAF). His career commenced at the School of Physical Training, where he played a pivotal role in shaping the physical preparedness of service personnel. His expertise in physical education facilitated his progression to the position of Physical Education Officer, ultimately culminating in his appointment as Officer Commanding of the institution itself. This role not only underscored his leadership capabilities but also highlighted his commitment to fostering the physical readiness and overall well-being of military members. Following his tenure in physical training, Sqn Ldr Bryce concluded his distinguished career at the Defence College of Logistics, Policing, and Administration in

Shrivenham – a Tri-Service facility dedicated to instructing officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force in various facets of leadership, military strategy, and defence structures. Colonel Fletcher's career within the military reflects a different but equally significant perspective, particularly within the context of healthcare and operational leadership. Serving in the Queen Alexandra's Nursing Corps, Col Fletcher has gained extensive experience in diverse and challenging environments, having deployed to numerous locations around the globe. His leadership roles included oversight of field hospitals in active conflict zones as well as in garrison settings at home. This multifaceted experience has equipped him with unique insights into the challenges faced by healthcare professionals in military settings. His final posting took place at Catterick, where he managed operations at a military hospital, further cementing his commitment to the well-being of service members and their families. In their post-military careers, both Sqn Ldr Bryce and Col Fletcher have transitioned into roles within charitable organisations aimed at supporting veterans and the broader armed forces community. Sqn Ldr Bryce now contributes his expertise and experience to the "Walking with the Wounded" charity, which focuses on providing assistance to veterans facing difficulties in their postservice lives. Meanwhile, Col Fletcher lends his skills to "Help for Heroes," an organisation dedicated to empowering wounded veterans and fostering their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Together, these narratives not only illustrate the individual journeys of these officers but also underscore the critical importance of leadership in addressing the ongoing needs and challenges faced by both current and former military members. Their experiences and current endeavours serve as a testament to the robust support networks that are essential for fostering resilience and recovery within the armed forces community. The insights gathered from leaders such as Sqn Ldr Bryce and Col Fletcher will be invaluable in shaping our understanding of military leadership and the crucial support required to enhance the overall welfare of those who have served.

Recruitment

Contact was made with veterans' hubs in the Liverpool City Region who supported veterans with interventions to address pre-custodial behaviours having recently served a custodial sentence. An information sheet was distributed to the organisations explaining the aims and objectives of the research and what this would entail for participants.

- Veterans HQ and Tom Harrison House agreed to support the study. An information pack regarding the purpose of the study and what their role and responsibilities would entail were circulated. The organisations were then asked to confirm whether they were supporting individuals that matched the inclusion criteria.
- Acting as gatekeepers, the organisations then put me in touch with potential participants (who met the inclusion criteria).
- Information packs were then distributed to those interested in taking part in the study via the respective organisations. Also, visits to the respective hubs were made to explain the research to the prospective participants, to help them to decide if they were going to take part on the study.
- The information was also recorded and made available on a CD to avoid any complications or embarrassment with regard to the literacy levels of individuals. It stressed that individuals would not be hindered by not participating, nor would they gain any advantages by taking part.

Vulnerable participants

It is reasonable to assume that individuals who have served in the armed forces and have been incarcerated may be vulnerable. The discourse from the last 20 or more years has been concerned with the mental health and wellbeing of those serving in the armed forces and veterans. Sean Rayment discussed the plight of this demographic in the Mirror newspaper

online (5 March 2022). He referred to up to 1 million veterans experiencing problems with mental health. He stated that up to 40% of the 2.5 million veterans in the UK are likely to suffer with problems associated with depression, anxiety, alcoholism, and post traumatic distress.

Similar news headlines entered public discourse regarding the welfare of servicemen and women during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2010 and 2011 both Treadwell and Fossey released research papers about wellbeing in the armed forces and in Treadwell's case, those caught up in the criminal justice system. Treadwell declared that, although tragic, those who lost their lives on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan may not be the only casualties of war. He declared that other victims would be those servicemen and women who return home in the UK with a limited support network available to help them.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research guide principles for methods and study design and the practices involved. The researcher adhered to the codes of practice that govern the collection of data from participants. The way in which research was carried out was informed by key ethical principles, which are 1) Autonomy, 2) Beneficence, 3) Non-maleficence and 4) Justice (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013).

Autonomy – The right to confidentiality and privacy

As the principal investigator, I understood that I was – and remain – obligated to protect the identity of participants, respect their privacy, and be explicit and truthful about the purpose and all aspects of the research study. Each participant was protected through the process of informed consent; they were provided with a participation information sheet which afforded clear and accurate information about the purposes and aims of the research study to help them decide whether to participate or not.

The participation sheets informed them of their rights to take part and that if they did not wish to carry on participating, how and when they could withdraw without any further obligation. It was made explicit that their participation was entirely voluntary and that there was no pressure to take part. It is argued that this is the most important principle in the codes of ethics for researchers to abide by (Gomm, 2004). To avoid any embarrassment associated with literacy issues, the participation information sheet was recorded in full onto a CD and media file that could be sent via email and listened to.

To ensure that the participants fully understood what participation entailed, each received a study information pack containing the CD, a copy of the timeline grid (supported by an explanation of what timelines are and their purpose as well as the format for semi-structured interviews), and information about the meetings and interviews and where these would be conducted. I have already acknowledged that veterans are a vulnerable group and so may suffer from issues such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), alcoholism and drug abuse or other issues such as viruses (HIV, Aids, Hepatitis and of current concern Covid) and instances of violence.

Beneficence and non-maleficence

As far as my own reflections on the ethics and purpose of the study are concerned, I have placed these two principles together, as beneficence deals with the benefits of the study and weighs it against the personal costs of participants taking part. The benefits of the study may include the findings that lead to both theoretical and applied knowledge for the benefit of the wider demographic. In the case of this study, this may be influencing the introduction of educational programmes for those in military service as well as after they leave service to enhance life chances. Alternatively, failure to conduct the research may be to the detriment of society and lead to the loss of opportunities to improve those life chances. There may also be other personal benefits such as the satisfaction of taking part in the study and making a

positive contribution to it as well as a better understanding of their own lives whilst being able to address them.

The personal costs to which I alluded may include engaging with issues of self-esteem, embarrassment, loss of trust in relations, and loss of autonomy and self-determination. As I discovered whilst completing my own timeline, the research process could cause emotional difficulties for individuals being asked to recall certain events and experiences from across their lives.

Non-maleficence looks at not causing any harm to participants whether that be intentional or otherwise. This meant that at the early planning stage of the study I had to anticipate any harm that might inadvertently be caused for participants. As a result, I put other potential sources of support in place to mitigate this. For example, I ensured that when timelines and interviews were being conducted, that follow-up support by the hubs would be made available in the environment where they would feel safe and comfortable. It was not only the safety of participants that I had to plan for, but I also had to consider my own welfare and well-being.

IPA & Methodological 'Justice'

Justice is a relatively new concept in research ethics, and it refers to the fair selection of participants for research purposes (Mertens and Ginsberg, 2009). The purpose of this study was to afford veterans a voice who have found themselves embroiled in – or are running the risk of getting involved with – the CJS. The study aims to create a safe space for those veterans to articulate their lived experiences and give an understanding of the events that have led them onto their respective journeys. IPA is concerned with the participant's personal assessment of events that they have experienced, as opposed to a researcher imposing an 'objective' version of the events. Such complex research situations risk being hindered by the researchers' own experiences and assumptions; therefore, as part of IPA, this is recognised and included as part of making sense of the research and data (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

Smith and Nizza (2022, p. 3-10) describe IPA as 'a method designed to understand people's lived experiences and how they make sense of it'. It allows individuals to contextualise events in their personal and social environment. IPA has been used to tackle an assortment of research questions across multiple areas. IPA is just one of a number of different qualitative research methods with an idiographic focus that looks at unique life stories. Unlike quantitative studies the minimum number of participants using IPA can be set at one, but a number between one and seven tends to produce a rich, depth of data without losing any individual stories. Its purpose is to give an understanding of how an individual, in a specific situation, makes sense of it. They make sense of their own experiences and contextualise them to give a greater understanding.

According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009, p. 82-101), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) comprises a systematic approach that unfolds in six distinct stages, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of individuals. Stage one is characterised by an exhaustive process of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts while simultaneously listening to the corresponding audio recordings. This dual engagement with the data ensures that the focus remains solely on the subject's experiences and narratives, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the context in which the participant's thoughts and feelings are situated. Such meticulous attention to detail during this stage is pivotal as it establishes a solid foundation for subsequent analysis. In the second stage, researchers embark on an initial level of analysis by making detailed notes regarding their observations and interpretations of the data. This stage is often described as the most labour-intensive and intricate part of the analysis process, as it requires prolonged engagement with the text. The research team is encouraged to capture a broad spectrum of insights without imposing predefined themes or categories at this juncture. Consequently, this stage serves as a critical point for identifying how participants articulate their experiences and the various nuances that characterise their narratives. As the analysis progresses to stage three, the investigator strategically identifies emergent themes that arise from the initial notes.

This thematic identification is not merely an exercise in categorisation but rather a reflective process that seeks to unveil the underlying meanings and significances embedded within the participants' accounts. In stage four of the analysis, researchers draw connections between the identified themes, thereby contextualising them within the broader narrative framework.

This stage is essential for elucidating how distinct themes interrelate and contribute to overarching insights concerning the participant's lived experience. The contextualization of themes enables researchers to interpret the various dimensions of the data more holistically. Moving to stage five, the analytical process shifts to the next subject, where similar methodological rigour is applied to maintain consistency in the analysis across multiple data sets. This repeated cycle of immersion and analysis ensures that each participant's voice is preserved while contributing to the collective understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Finally, in stage six, researchers synthesise findings by identifying common themes that emerge across all analysed data sets. This stage is vital for recognising patterns and variations that may exist among participants, thus enriching the overall interpretation of the findings. By doing so, the researchers can conclude broader implications and insights gleaned from the diverse lived experiences represented in the data. In summary, the six stages of analysis outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) provide a comprehensive framework for engaging with qualitative data using IPA. Each stage plays a crucial role in facilitating a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences, thereby contributing to the richness and depth of qualitative research.

IPA approaches identify key themes that are important to each individual and their specific journeys, whilst also allowing for the capture of collective themes common to all participants. It allows them to voice their experience and what they thought was responsible for their spiral into the behaviour and the consequences that occurred. This is reflected in Unwin and Winder's (2021) study, which focused on veterans in the criminal justice system. They opted to use IPA as an analysis tool to explore the lived experiences of veterans in prison.

Data Collection

Having considered more established approaches to data collection, such as questionnaires and surveys, I decided to opt for a more in-depth, rich form of data generation. For this, I used IPA as the general methodological approach and the use of a timeline and semi-structured interview to support this. IPA proved an effective match for these types of data collection methods, as combined, they encouraged participants to give rich, first-person, detailed accounts of experiences (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009).

The primary method, the completion of a timeline, informed the nature of the second method, which was a semi-structured interview. These were methods primarily used by France cited in Costa and Murphy (2015) when he was conducting a study about the 'youth crime nexuses and how young people interacted and engaged with crime and the social space surrounding them. Timeline maps were used to scrutinise significant events in the participants lives and any engagement that they may have had with service providers such as the Police, probation service and youth organisations. This was followed up with semi-structured interviews that would go into greater detail of the individual and the events that they had highlighted in the timeline map. These methods allowed for the exploration of the pathways, relationships, crime, and the collection of a deep, rich, set of data required by such a qualitative study.

Carrying out the research study in this way allowed participants to be reflective of their lives and to identify the significance of important events and experiences that they felt may have been factors in turning to risk-taking behaviours or crime. It also allowed me to identify events that could be explored in greater depth with participants during the interview stage. Having identified events on an individual basis this, in turn, allowed for the detection of any common themes or in some circumstances any anomalies to be made across the participating group.

As the researcher conducting this study it was of benefit that I had served in the UK armed forces with regards to trust, and rapport with participants. I had the advantage of understanding

any terminology used, the conditions that they served in, and to an extent, the experiences that they had whilst serving.

Primary data collection – Timelines

Timelines

The researcher was provided with a private room at the hubs to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. This afforded them integrity and allowed them to speak freely about experiences in a secure, familiar environment. Each was advised that they would be anonymised in the study and were given a thorough re-briefing on what the study was for and how it would be conducted – including the different stages they would be involved. They were then asked to complete consent forms. The main staff contact at each of the hubs also completed a Gatekeeper consent form in line with ethical protocols at Liverpool John Moores University.

It was whilst attending a Future for Heroes seminar at Brathay in the Lake District that I first encountered the use of timelines.²⁷ Each candidate was asked to produce their own timeline illustrating their own journeys. They were asked to choose a starting point and show the ups and downs that they had experienced; they denoted highs and lows with different faces: smiley faces for good and frowns for not-so-good times. This enabled them to reflect on experiences and start to analyse the course that their lives had taken, along with the reasons that they thought why this happened.

Timelines are increasingly used for the collection of data in qualitative studies, according to Adriansen (2012); they can be used as a research tool to visualise a series of phenomena over time. In its most simplistic form, the timeline is constructed along a series of events, set

²⁷ The seminar at Brathay focussed on the treatment of service personnel who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan who had been diagnosed with PTSD as a result of their experiences whilst serving in those theatres of conflict.

out in chronological order. The creation of visual timelines by participants informs additional conversational elements (such as in the case of this study, the use of semi-structured interviews), allowing for even richer data to be collected and explored. The use of annotated

timelines as a visual method involves the selection and organisation of data by the participant, and this flexibility ensures that a deeper understanding of experiences over a period is addressed.

I commenced the data collection by conducting a pilot study; the participant of the pilot study had served in the army. He was asked to complete the timeline across the life phases of formative years, during their military service, along with their post-service experiences. The pilot study allowed me to reflect on and assess the effectiveness of the draft timeline and semistructured interview. This important preparatory stage afforded an essential insight to what worked and what needed adjusting before implementing the full study.

Each participant was invited to an initial session so that I could explain and introduce them to the flexible principle of the timeline, and to negotiate the best way for each of them to complete it. The timeline was to be completed using their own life stories and events, by identifying experiences across the spectrum of the grid that they felt were significant. Those events were to be placed in chronological order – using the timeline grid – creating visual indications of personal meaning (Kolar et al., 2015).

During the first timeline stage, each participant was asked to complete their grid encompassing the three distinct phases of: pre-service, (starting from their early years, looking at their family life, school, where they lived and their friends). Then military service (which included joining up and the branch in which they served, along with any experiences of combat).²⁸ Finally, they asked to plot out the final phase: post service (when they transitioned from the military and

²⁸ This includes peacekeeping duties in areas such as the Former Yugoslavia Republic and on the African continent.

returned to 'civvy street'). They were invited to think about difficulties that they may have encountered and experienced. In conjunction with pre- / during / and post-service eras. Each timeline also explored and plotted key events that related to the three formats of formal, informal and non-formal education.

It is further suggested by Adriansen (2012) that the more informal and conversational timeline meetings might also be recorded to enable the researcher to review and understand more nuanced meanings and points made. Accordingly, I did record the early sessions, but this was dependent upon obtaining consent from each person. Prior to the actual commencement and completion of the of the timeline, I addressed and clarified the following key areas:

- At what point might the timeline begin, and where should it end
- Should the respondent start from birth, or is there another meaningful point to start
- In relation to formal education, should the timeline commence at nursery or the first year of primary school (not all children commence their educational journey at the same age, some will go to pre-school or to nursery and even reception classes)

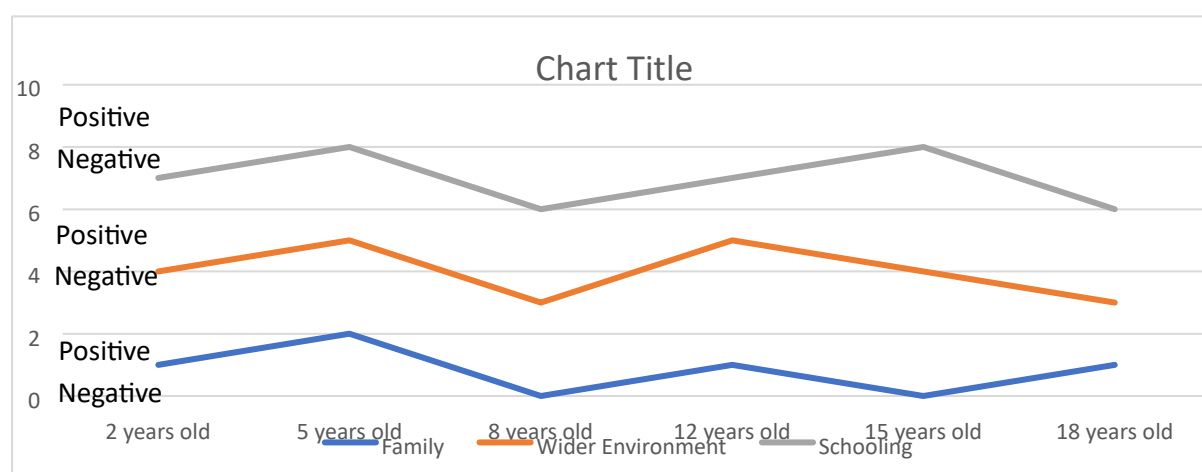
To document each timeline journey, participants were given a flip chart and different coloured markers; it was explained that they could use as many pages as they felt necessary to complete the process. Participants were allowed the autonomy of deciding when their timeline should begin – within the bounds of the grid provided. All decided that they would commence their timeline from early years (circa 4- to 5-years-old) and incorporate their family context and experiences.

During the timeline completion stage, we met one more time to address any questions or concerns that each participant might have. This ensured that key areas were being identified, which could be further explored during the interview part of data collection. Upon completion of the timelines, several themes started to emerge that could be addressed collectively as part of the interview stage. For example, the theme of socio-economic deprivation and being

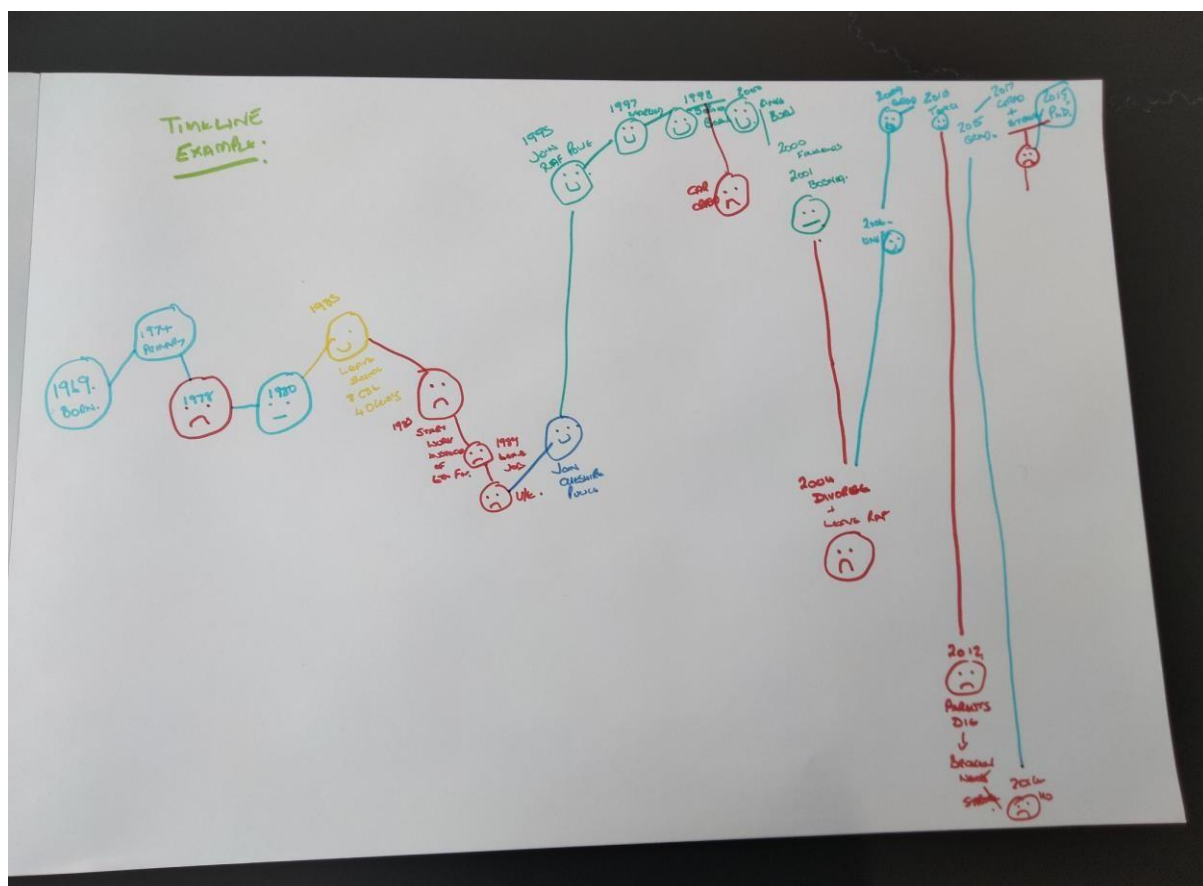
brought up in service families was common. As noted above, each timeline addressed first enters with formal education. They were invited to consider and reflect on their compulsory education up until the age of 18, or earlier if they join the armed forces at age 16. It then moved onto their engagement with education whilst serving in the military; this included any trade training and military qualifications that they achieved, as well as any mainstream educational opportunities.

Participants could decide how to segment the timeline, such as in the example below. The example chart below illustrates the identification of possible experiences across an educational journey that identifies experiences across family, schooling and the wider environment, tracked by three different lines on the chart. To further enhance the information on the chart, respondents were invited to use faces/emojis to denote happy, sad, and indifferent events along with labels for the specific events.

Example of a timeline



Alternatively, participants could choose to use a single, consecutive line from the beginning of the timeline to the end, whilst using different colours to signify the different time periods and incidents (see below).



Example of my own timeline

The second example of a timeline is one that I created to identify my own experiences; my decision was to use the one-line variant that takes the journey through highlights and other major events in my life. It travelled through my early years and was inclusive of family, education, and wider ecology. This then continued onto my work-life experiences and finally into the present day. I decided to use emojis to denote good and bad experiences, smiles denoting good positive experiences and frowns denoting negative and unhappy times. I also decided to add labels to show what events were taking place at the time. I felt that it was a particularly important part of the research process that I completed my own timeline. It enabled me to experience the emotional difficulties that the participants might feel when they were to complete their own timelines. For me, remembering some aspects of my life was difficult, as I re-experienced some strong emotions such as anger and frustration; it was also difficult

sometimes to place some events in order due to strong feelings on certain matters. As can be seen in this timeline, it is mostly in chronological order; however, there are some areas that I had missed out and had to add them by way of a branch off the main line. This is in line with Adriansen (2012), who notes that interviewees might realise that they have put some events in a different order than they remembered, which means that they can deconstruct and reconstruct their experiences and narratives. This was most certainly the case for me and the construction of my own timeline; it thus enabled me to rearrange those events whilst adding others that I had missed out.

Both timeline examples can yield substantial amounts of data that offer insights into participants' lived experiences, enabling a deeper exploration of these narratives through carefully structured questioning during semi-structured interviews. The timeline serves not only as a method of data collection but also as a powerful visual aid that facilitates participants' ability to communicate their stories and experiences in a comprehensible manner. This approach underscores the importance of visual representation in qualitative research, as it enhances participants' engagement and encourages richer, more nuanced storytelling. The use of timelines as a research method has proven to be an effective and adaptable tool, effectively bridging the gap between the participants' subjective experiences and the researcher's analytical pursuits. This method encourages participants to reflect on their life events chronologically, allowing them to identify and emphasise significant moments that may have otherwise been overlooked in traditional interviewing techniques. According to Sheridan, Taylor, and Dupuis (2011), the timeline not only aids in the articulation of personal narratives but also fosters a deeper understanding of self by prompting individuals to create rich accounts of notable events. Such a methodology not only promotes introspection but also enhances the collaborative dynamic between the researcher and participant. Moreover, the timeline approach cultivates a truly symbiotic research environment, in which participants are not merely subjects but active contributors to the research process. This collaborative paradigm ultimately enriches the study's findings and deepens the understanding of the participants'

perspectives. By prioritising the co-construction of knowledge, researchers can develop a more holistic comprehension of the complexities of individual experiences and the social contexts in which they occur. Through this method, researchers are better equipped to honour the voice and agency of participants, leading to a more ethically attuned and representative body of qualitative research.

The completion of each individual timeline was underpinned by a comprehensive framework, specifically manifested in the form of a grid, which can be referenced in Appendix A. This grid delineates three distinct strands of education – namely, formal, non-formal, and informal. The categorisation of these educational strands is pivotal as it allows for a nuanced exploration of the participants' educational journeys and experiences. To facilitate a deeper understanding and encourage reflective engagement, each participant was provided with a copy of this grid. The grid served as a critical tool during the conceptualisation and construction of their individualised timelines. By referencing the structured categories, participants were able to methodically categorise their experiences, reflecting on the diverse modes of learning that have shaped their educational pathways. This structured approach not only aids in the organisation of thoughts but also promotes a comprehensive analysis of the various influences encountered throughout their learning experiences. Moreover, the utilisation of the grid fosters an environment that encourages critical thinking and self-assessment, as participants evaluate the relative impacts of formal educational institutions, informal learning opportunities, and nonformal education settings in their lives. It is through this reflective process that a richer, more layered understanding of their educational narratives can be constructed, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on the multidimensional nature of education.

Secondary Collection – Semi-structured Interviews

The completion of the timelines informed several questions that could be asked across all of the participants. Whilst the use of semi-structured interviews in conjunction with the timelines allowed for a greater depth in the data, in this study, participants appeared to be more talkative

and relaxed during the conversational stages of the timeline completion. Nevertheless, the interview stage still allowed for extra layers of meaning to be discussed and collated.

The purpose of conducting the semi-structured interviews was to make the participants feel comfortable whilst allowing for additional dialogue to take place, and to identify further points to explore and probe. The questions in this instance had been identified during the timeline stage and so had been largely dictated by the experiences of the participants themselves. Conducting interviews in this way minimised the need to take notes, enabling the researcher to listen to what the participants were saying during the process. It also allowed me to explore their perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards key events.

Participants were free to openly discuss their experiences – if they wished to do so. They could also reflect upon them and explore the possibility of alternative actions (i.e., what they might have done differently with the benefit of hindsight). Through the honesty of their thoughts and observations that they all expressed such a depth and richness, which was a privilege to witness. The data collection processes for both the timeline and the interviews were carried out in accordance with the ethical guidance set out by the ethics board at Liverpool John Moores University. All participants were informed and reminded that they did not have to participate if they did not wish to do so; that they could stop at any time; and that they were there on a completely voluntary basis.

Other forms of data collection

Anecdotal evidence

Reflective diary

I considered the use of a reflective diary to be an important part of the study, as it provided a richer context regarding my own thoughts and experiences throughout the study. It captured background information that might otherwise have been hidden or missed and enriched the methodological aims of the study by providing a better understanding of the process and the

participants. The diary took the form of a notebook in which I could write observations following each of my interactions with the participants throughout the timeline and/or semi-structured interview sessions.

After each of the sessions, I was able to write about the initial ideas and themes that arose, as well as note observations about each participant's general condition (angry, relaxed, cynical, confused, agitated). Notes also captured the logistics of each session, e.g., those present along with the location and time of each session. It also recorded why a session did not take place and the reasons for this. This might have been the participant not showing up, as maybe they needed medical intervention, or simply a change in circumstance.

Summary

The interviews were held within the veteran support locations of Tom Harrison House in Anfield, Liverpool and The Veterans HQ in St Domingo's Vale in Liverpool. Upon initial contact with the named organisations, they were all incredibly supportive of the study. Other Veterans Hubs and organisations within the region were also contacted regarding the study and to seek their input and support.

The collection of data took place over a 14-week period. Weeks 1 – 4: the initial introduction of the study, (and how to complete the timeline). Weeks 5 – 8: the first stage of data collection, where participants completed their own timelines. Weeks 9 – 13: the second stage of data collection followed by the semi-structured interviews. In week 14 there were follow-up and welfare checks to ensure that the participants continued to be safe and well (this was in addition to the regular checks on welfare during the previous stages of data collection).

By actively engaging with veterans' personal testimonies and identifying critical events that they had been deemed significant by the contributors, a more profound and nuanced understanding of the issues was attained. The timeline and interview approach necessitated an integrative methodology that prioritised qualitative insights. This fostered a holistic

perspective which was democratically negotiated with each of the veterans. Providing them with an opportunity to articulate their own narrative regarding lived experience, the timeline as a methodological tool facilitated reflective practice, and systematically organised their experiences as part of a chronological framework, facilitated through communication with the researcher.

Data was then thematically analysed using IPA, and the themes were then further contextualised using the theories of Bourdieu, Merton, and Hirschi to give an understanding to the influences and events that led the participants towards pre-custodial behaviours or criminality. The three theories complement each other. Bourdieu's theory on habitus looks at identity and place along with cultural and social values. Merton looks at the strains placed on individuals to attain success or material wealth by lawful means (in the context of this study, it also looks at the need to conform within the military context, to avoid isolation). Whilst Hirschi looks at facets of self and social control and how such influences and measures might have assisted in the avoidance of problematic behaviours.

Chapter 7

Results

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings made during the study and the construction of an IPA model used to map and explore the data collected from the participants. There is also a section on the issues faced during the study. The themes that arose from the timelines and interviews conducted with the participants will be discussed along with the problems that they have faced.

All participants stated that they had a good upbringing with generally positive family relationships whilst growing up – although individual circumstances differed. Some had witnessed the break-up of the family and were brought up in a single-parent household with siblings. Others indicated that although parents stayed together, there had been difficulties

with at least one parent whilst growing up. Others indicated that they had come from service families who had one parent away for extended periods during formative years, which affected them in different ways. Some experienced difficulties with relationships and making bonds with peers at school, and subsequently later on in life, with partnerships ending in divorce, along with estrangement from children. The different respondents and emergent themes will be discussed and broken down in greater detail below:

Participant 1. Simon is in his 50s. He joined the army straight from school, having passed the initial entrance tests; he is from the Northwest of England. Upon leaving the army he continued to drink and openly admitted that he was an alcoholic before moving on to drugs.

Participant 2. Gavin is also in his 50's, he joined the army after failing his eye test for his preferred position as a pilot. He served in theatres of conflict and war in his role. Gavin originates from a service family and subsequently moved homes as a result.

Participant 3. James (57) also joined the army straight from school at age 16 and served in areas of conflict and war before leaving and moving into education. He originates from a service family in the Northeast of England and moved around different areas before settling and being sent to a boarding school for stability reasons.

Participant 4. Sean is another who joined the army at age 16 straight from school. Sean took part in the pilot study and is the only person who has not been involved in pre-custodial behaviours or the CJS. He left the military to join another public service organisation and progressed through the promotion process before moving into an educational role.

Participant 5. Lee is another who joined the army at the age of 16 straight from school and was made redundant after several years serving. Lee is also from the Northwest. Lee became homeless after leaving military service.

Participant 6. Keith is the only one who did not serve in the regular forces and joined his local reserve regiment. Keith is originally from the Southeast before moving to the Northwest to escape the criminal life that he had fallen into and the people that he was associating with.

For the purposes of analysing and codifying respondent details, I have put together the following Codification Grid:

Participant	Timeline	Semi-structured Interview
1. Simon (P1)	SI/T	SI/SSI
2. Gavin (P2)	GA/T	GA/SSI
3. James (P3)	JA/T	JA/SSI
4. Sean (Pilot – P4)	SE/T	SE/SSI
5. Lee (P5)	LE/T	LE/SSI
6. Keith (P6)	KE/T	KE/SSI

All participants were more explicit about their experiences whilst completing and discussing their timelines rather than during the semi-structured interview. This is something that I will take into consideration when conducting future investigations should the opportunity arise.

Each had openly been honest about their offences which range from drunkenness, using drugs, criminal damage and violence apart from Sean who had no criminal involvement with the Criminal Justice System – but was the participant in the pilot study.

Using my reflective diary, I could see that I was feeling frustrated by not initially having many participants despite regular interactions with the partner organisations. With hindsight I have recognised that the parameters set for the inclusion criteria limited participant numbers; if I was to conduct this study again in the future then I would remove criteria that limited individuals to one custodial sentence or widen it further to those who have displayed criminal behavioural issues for those that may have come into contact with CJS agencies but not necessarily being

imprisoned. The organisations also dealt with a lot of individuals who had been released under licence which was an issue as the pandemic was still having an impact on HMPPS Ethical approval being granted. This also reduced the number of participants who could be approached to take part in the study.

The pilot study

Having completed the process of using the timeline myself, I commenced the collection of data using a pilot study to ascertain the effectiveness of the methods chosen for the study. The participant for the pilot was a veteran but had not been to prison and had not displayed any criminal behaviours. The data from the pilot study enabled me to refine the model for the other participants. The final grid and timeline model produced could be used in other studies to explore individual engagements in certain actions. The theoretical keyword model – which can be seen below – adapts the social control theory of Hirschi, and how he suggested that active engagement in aspects of life might dictate the extent to which a person might become involved in crime. It also uses Merton's theory of strain and why people become involved in criminal behaviours because of an inability to achieve status and belonging through more socially acceptable routes. All of this is then put into the context through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital regarding aspects of military and civilian life.

Theoretical principles combined into a keyword model:

Engagement, Strain and Education

Early years

Family/ Relationships

School

Friends/ Peers

Sports clubs Activities

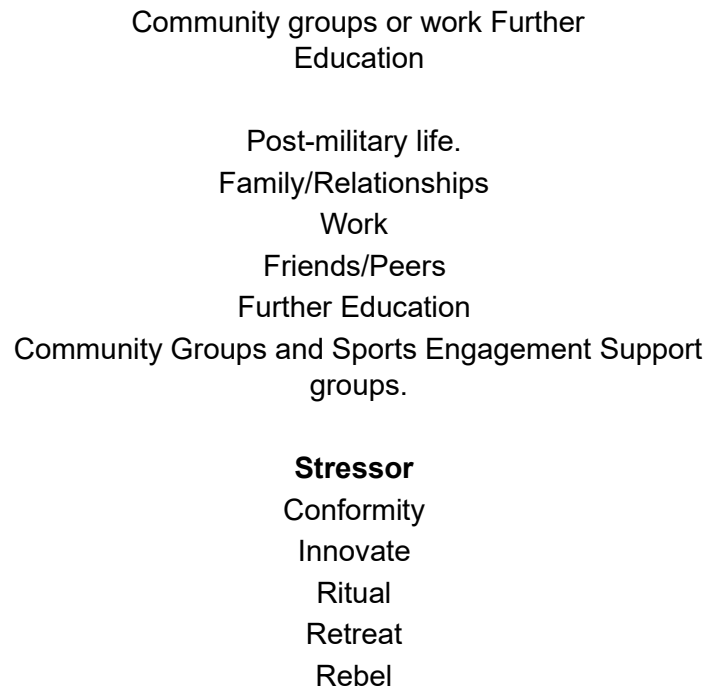
Youth groups

Military life

Family/ Relationships

Work

Friends/Peers



How the data was analysed

I contemplated utilising NVivo, a sophisticated qualitative data analysis software renowned for its advanced capabilities in managing complex datasets. I opted against this approach due to the intricacies of the software and my limited familiarity with its functionalities, which posed a number of issues. Instead, I employed a manual approach to data analysis, placing a strong emphasis on thematic exploration. I systematically scrutinised interviews and transcripts to identify and categorise emerging themes from the participants' responses. This qualitative methodology facilitated a deeper engagement with the data, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the subjects' perspectives and experiences. By prioritising the categorisation of emergent themes, I endeavoured to capture the richness inherent in the qualitative data, aligning my analysis with the research objectives. Ultimately, this rigorous analytical process enabled the discovery of meaningful patterns and insights, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. I devised a list of keywords, which I then put into a grid (see below). The themes had been identified from the timelines and semistructured interviews. Each of the themes will be discussed in more detail below.

Upon the completion of the timelines and semi-structured interviews a detailed review of the transcripts took place; as a result, twelve themes were identified from the data – see below. These themes were systematically mapped against the theory-influenced combined keyword model (as listed above). I then analysed the participant responses against this array of criteria. The methodical nature of this approach enabled a comprehensive alignment of respondent examples with the various theoretical frameworks, along with illuminating contributions that addressed the distinct types of learning experiences associated with the three recognised forms of education.

The identified data themes are as follows:

1. Family and Childhood
2. Education
3. Reasons for Joining
4. Military Life
5. Reasons for Leaving
6. Post-Military Life
7. Drugs and Alcohol
8. Criminal Behaviour and Activity
9. Homelessness
10. Structure
11. Rehabilitation
12. Education while Serving

The codified and thematised approach to analysing the data provided a robust framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted experiences of the participants. The data and respondent profiles offered nuanced contributions on the interplay of personal history and educational engagement within the context of military and post-military life.

Visual overview of the themes identified

Theme	Quotes	Theory
Family and childhood	"Father left the family unit when they were young". (SIT) "Yeah, it was. It was. But it was tough. It wasn't, you know, we didn't have. We didn't have much, but there was no there was no cases like, you know, child abuse or starving or to, you know, we had. We had a good childhood." (SISSI) "My father was a pilot in the RN" moved house a number of times. Mum, dad, and brother (3 years younger). Good family life (GTL) 'thriving'. (GSSI) Good supportive family Good friends and peers (GSSI)	Habitus Area of deprivation Single Parent family Strain Conditions of habitus lead to criminal behaviours and actions putting people on a trajectory of being incarcerated. Hirschi Believed that we are all capable of criminality and only our participation in structures prevents us from carrying out criminal activity. The more structures, the less likely an individual is to take part in criminal behaviour. It appears that at least for the first 11 years of this participants life his mother and family life gave that structure. Habitus Good supportive family but strained relationship with father.

	Good supportive family parents have been married 57 years. However, father not always present due to work commitments. (JTL) Had a good family and was fine, so. Not from a broken home. My mom and dads still married. Been married for 57 years. As he keeps telling me. Still, there's a woman over issue last week. So, I really have that, that, that runner. (JSSI) Supportive family but hard times financially	This led to a strain and rebellion against parents' wishes.
Education		

	“Being particularly bright in primary school, you know, but, but I mean, primary schools only like your ABC’s and 123, you know, but being I, I enjoyed reading”. (SISSI) Looking at why they left school without formal qualifications. Because. Recruiters came to the school, army recruiters and on the off chance, such as with I just went over to the career’s office. I passed the initial. I can’t remember the. Test call now but. You know, the initial test actually joins up and it was successful, and I just thought that was my attitude. So just once. I passed my test to. Get in. Just thought I didn’t need. To do it very quickly. (SSSI) Enjoyed school but was subjected to bullying and sexual abuse by a teacher. (GTL)	Strain This participant enjoyed his first experiences of school life, and it was only after going to secondary school did they display signs of delinquency. After going to secondary they started to smoke and ‘bunk off school’. Merton refers to the strain put onto individuals to achieve goals set by society using lawful means. His reference to the ‘American dream’ whereby a good education leads to good employment and material wealth is relevant in this study as the majority come from areas of deprivation across the NW. Habitus It is widely accepted that the military recruit for areas of high deprivation and it takes individuals with low educational attainment. Especially into the infantry regiments.
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	'Liked school finished with 5 GSCE's'. Gained 1 A level. (GAT) Teachers weren't engaging and it was a strict structure. Enjoyed sports and outdoor pursuits with the more practical subjects. (SET) Went to a boarding school as was from a service family. Not a good environment due to a culture of bullying and other things happening. Was not exceptional at school but gained several level 2 qualifications. Played rugby and was a member of the CCF at school. JASSI) Not encouraged to progress in school by teachers or parents and wanted to do a catering course. Joined army cadets where Learned new skills and was a good experience. Growing up I had multiple positive experiences with my education, I enjoyed all my learning experiences. I did move high schools twice due to my mother and father separating, this didn't affect my grades as I 'just got on with it'. This did however make me a quiet teenager as I faced some bullying as a moved school's. This I believe affected my learnt behaviours later in my military development.	
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	I then joined the Armed forces in 2007. With my GCSE's and upon passing my military BARB test, I was allowed to join The Core of Royal Engineers (Civil Engineering Bricklaying & concreting) as a Combat Engineer to then join a Field Squadron in my future unit. I went on to do multiple Qualifications wish I loved doing. (LET and SSI) Post military education! Level 1 NCFE - Interactive Media Level 1 OCR - User I.T Skills CFO - Veteran & subgroup Course Warrington Collage – Teaching Group Workshop (Multiple) FA - Leadership Course CGL - Alcohol Awareness CGL THH - Peer mentor Ambassador Graduation Level 2 NCFE - Mentoring NCFE I'm not good enough at the school and the reason why I wasn't going back to school was because I was expelled. Right, so I got myself expelled. At the back end of here. Because I got a little bit drunk. (JASSI)	
Reasons for joining		

	It was more of a job it was a job basically to join up. There was a job, there was a job, basically. To join up and I. Just went with the	Strain Left school before completing his exams meaning that this was to become a constraint in later life.
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	flow once I passed the tests. (SISSI) 'Wanted to be a pilot but eyesight wasn't up to standards, so tried to join RM failed at first attempt and got in second time but only lasted 6 weeks'. Joined the army after leaving school. Transferred to a different regiment (GAT) I joined after my O levels. Wanted to see the world and basically have an adventure. The Falklands war really sparked my interest in the Mil. (SESSI) Eventually joined RLC. Joined the jlr at 161/5 Joined the army against parents' wishes who wanted him to join the RN/ Joined the army junior leaders from school. . He didn't want me to join the army. As far as he was concerned, most waste my life waste my time. Him being in the in the in the Royal Navy didn't help, but in his mind. The reason why I'm being sent to boarding school was so that I could follow. I could do better than him. (JASSI) Joined the army with friends from the cadets did hgv courses.	Strain Rebellion against the wishes of parents
Military life		

	Posted to Germany where beer was cheap and after we had finished our duties it was straight into the bars drinking. (SISSI)	Habitus
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	There was lots of free time if we weren't on exercise or training. Tours of Bosnia and Northern Ireland. Saw things in Bosnia that weren't nice'. Failed P company Deployed Kenya and Northern Ireland, Macedonia, Afghanistan (GASSI) Education in a military context Engaged in all activities such as skiing, hockey, sailing, diving, social activities. Home and Regt life Social belonging. Did hgv course but left without a trade (SISSI) 1984 OK, now. I don't know if you heard about this, the junior leaders or training. It was called the Junior Army. If you would, you would train to the same standard you did the same those one training but the same time. That phase one training took place over. An extended period of a year. . Over a period every year. I really liked it. I thought it was a. A great experience	The culture of what he had joined influenced his behaviour. He conformed to his ecology to avoid isolation.
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Reasons for leaving the military	So, I served 10 years out and because I had a. Drinking problem in the army? I got demoted twice and they offered me a redundancy package, so phase three redundancies came out then in 94 and. (SISSI) Got caught with legal highs and strong painkillers and administratively discharged (GAT) Joined the Police Went through the ranks (SESSI)	
Post military life		

	So, I came out the army and I was already. I'd say I'd say I was already an alcoholic, but untreated and, you know, I hadn't recognised I was. Addiction Education Pg cert and degree Organisations Scouts Brit cycling First aid trainer	Habitus Participants have talked about the culture and institution of the military. Which was one of drinking, violence, camaraderie and a brotherhood especially in the army. When they left, they talk about loss of identity and pride. Strain Most of these left without relevant qualifications to what is now civilian life. However, what they did gain was other life skills such as leadership, working as a team member. However, employers look for these formal qualifications and most struggled to reintegrate because of lack of opportunity.
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Drugs and alcohol	This is brilliant, loved it and it just it filled the hole. They've just done something to me that alcohol didn't you know? And of course, then then, then it goes from using to actually being addicted and needing. (SISSI) 'I took drugs whilst at college in the 90's but no crimes!' (GASSI) Addiction	
Criminal behaviour and activity		

	Petty crime such as criminal damage. (SISSI) Drugs	Hirschi The theory that we all have the capability to display criminal behaviour but the more structure that we have in our lives the less likely we are to commit crime. As we have heard from the participant there was little or no structure to their life either in the military or post military. In the case of the first participant, he lost the little structure that he had in his life, when he was 'thrown out' of the family home as his wife had endured his alcoholism and drugs abuse whilst he was serving and post service.
Homelessness	'I would make up make up scenarios in my head that weren't real. Of course, my wife, my wife at the time. She was the one that suffered through this, and she divorced me and got. I came home from work one night actually, and it was just like a big troop of police with my bags in my hand and they said you've gotta go she's got a restraining order. And I left from the house, and I was just living on the streets from there I didn't care'.	Hirschi As previously stated, the participants had very little structure or in some cases none at all. Participants stated that they had lost their family because of the trajectory of criminal behaviour and in some cases had no jobs or had lost them as a result of their behaviour.
	Homeless for 10 years (SISSI) Been out 10 year now, never did no resettlement. As I have multiple qualifications and didn't know what I wanted to do.	

Rehabilitation	Six and half years clean with one blip. So I was in prison. And I've seen a sign on the wall saying it basically said if you are a veteran then ring this number and we can help you. So I initially rang you because I was thinking I'm gonna get out. And it wasn't, and it was to an organisation called Project Nova, which is part of walking with the Wounded. (SISSI) Referred to rehabilitation services	
Structure	Needs to have a structure in his life. "After leaving the military I would be sat at home telling myself that (opening another beer) it isn't right, I knew that it wasn't right, but I would carry on drinking". "I would finish work first at 4 then 3 and eventually I didn't go in at all. I would go back to the block where I would start drinking. I had nothing in common with anybody in there so just drank and drank in my room I was good at hiding it. The Police arrested me for being drunk getting off a train." (anecdotal)	Hirschi One of the overriding thoughts of the participants in this study is the lack of structure that they had which appears to have started whilst serving in the military and continued post service. There have been many comments about the amount of downtime when not deployed, or on exercise and training. This has tended to lead to increased alcohol consumption and the issues that is associated with.
	Lost parent Had cancer. Good family life Engagement with regiment association Cycling and socially (SET)	

Education whilst serving	If the courses that have been available here (THH) had been available whilst I was serving, I wouldn't be here now. Level 2 - English, maths and I.T. City & Guilds – Bricklaying & concreting. NVQ – Defence Engineering Level 3 Diploma – Defence Engineering, Bricklaying & Concreting Supervisor. Level 1 – Sports nutrition Level 2 – Gym Instructor Army – All Arms Physical Training Instructor (LESSI) Engaged in all activities such as skiing, hockey, sailing, diving, social activities. (SET)	Hirschi
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Data theme 1 – Family and childhood

I have given the first participant (P1) the name Simon (SI) for the purposes on anonymity. Simon expressed the following opinion about their formative years “Yeah, it was. It was. But it was tough. It wasn't, you know, we didn't have. We didn't have much, but there was no there was no cases like, you know, child abuse or starving or to, you know, we had. We had a good childhood.” His father had left the family at a very early stage of his life, which left his mother to bring him up and his siblings. This theme recurred amongst a few of the participants, whereby one parent had left the family or had passed away.

There were other instances where fathers were absent for a large proportion of the time due to being in the armed forces; for example, both Gavin (GA/T) (P2) and James (J/T) (P3) both

had a father in the armed forces who served away for long periods of time. However, in the case of Gavin, this did not appear to affect him as much, as he states, “My father was a pilot in the RN and moved house several times. Mum, Dad, and brother (3 years younger).” But went on to say that he had a “Good family life”. James (J/SSI) also stated that he had and still has a good supportive family, stating, “Good supportive family, parents have been married 57 years he said, “Had a good family and was fine, so. Not from a broken home. My mum and dad’s still married. Been married for 57 years. As he keeps telling me” (JA/SSI). However, his father was not always present due to work commitments. As a result, it was decided that he attend a boarding school for boys to enable him to have an influential male constant in his life, in addition to his mother and female relatives.

Sean (SE/T) (P4), who took part in the pilot study, had not had any contact with the criminal justice system and described his childhood as “thriving” and that he had “a good supportive family” and a group of “Good friends and peers”.

Lee (L/T) (P5) stated that “I grew up with my mum and dad for the first 12 years, then with just my mother until I was 16”. His mum and dad separated when he was 12, and his dad went on to develop another relationship from which Lee (L/SSI) gained stepsiblings. Despite the upheaval, Lee stated that “My childhood was generally a happy one” He talked about “My best childhood memories were of caravan holidays with my mum and dad, my sister and aunties and uncles bringing the family together”. He also admits that his father went on to marry again and had more children, but he did not have any relationship with his stepbrother or sister (L/SSI). His mother also developed a further relationship with his stepfather and specified, “My mother settled for my stepfather when I was 15. My stepdad treated my mother well. I was lucky to have two fathers and two mothers in my life, and I then joined the Armed Forces”.

So, from the comments made by the participants, it appears that they considered their relationship with their families during their formative years, overall, as both positive and

supportive experiences and that their childhood experiences no matter how the family was constructed, were perceived as being generally good.

Two of the participants, Simon and Lee, indicated that they came from areas of deprivation, with Lee speaking about coming from a council estate and having no boundaries whilst growing up. None of them at this point had become involved or displayed any signs of criminal behaviour or had any contact with the criminal justice system, and only Lee had been witnessing to any signs of domestic abuse with arguments between his parents prior to them splitting up. They all stated that they had a good network of friends with the exception of James who stated that he found it difficult to make friends during this period of his growing up which he states that this is still a problem for him currently and still has few close friends which he puts down to the experiences he had during his formative years.

Theories and family engagement

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus explains how people from different environments develop different ways of behaving, thinking and the perception of the world in which they exist. This in turn shapes what happens in the social lives of individuals and has a direct impact on their language, social interactions, language, education, and how they act. There are several factors involved, such as economic class, gender, race, religion, nationality, and family background (Ramsey, 2024). All the participants considered that they had good supportive family networks during their developing years, which they expressed had a positive impact. This also possibly reflects the lack of criminal behaviour displayed by any of the participants during their childhood and early teen years.

Some participants identified themselves as coming from disadvantaged areas, yet they felt supported by their families. Robert Merton theorised that societal goals drive individuals to commit crimes in pursuit of achievements like a good education, stable employment, and material wealth. However, even though two participants acknowledged their struggles due to growing up in deprived circumstances, this theory appears to be contradicted by the

experiences of this group. The alternative side to the same coin is put forward by Travis Hirschi who believed that anyone is capable of committing crimes, but he focused on understanding the reasons why they choose not to. He identified several factors that deter individuals from engaging in criminal behaviour, with one key factor being positive family engagement. This seems to hold true for the participants during their formative years before they joined the military.

The timelines and follow-up interviews were framed within the context of participants' learning experiences. In the case of families, this falls under informal learning, where individuals gain knowledge from family members and friends. All participants shared that they had positive upbringings, highlighting that they learned the difference between right and wrong and how to conduct themselves properly. Some participants mentioned having strong friendships during their childhood, while others found it challenging to make friends in their formative years.

Overall, all participants reflected on their family experiences positively, and several reported maintaining friendships from their youth, and continuing to engage with those friends to-date. Others participated in activities like sports or various groups that kept them engaged. While the focus is on the three recognised formats of education – formal, informal, and non-formal – it is clear that a significant portion of their learning at this stage stemmed from family interactions and social networks. The next theme will delve into their formal education and school experiences.

Data theme 2 – Education, including pre-service and post-service

The second theme that was identified was the participants' experiences of the formal education that they received. This was their experience of their compulsory education in primary, secondary and post-compulsory settings. Sean expressed that he enjoyed his primary setting but revealed that he did not believe that he was “particularly bright in primary school, you know, but, but I mean, primary schools only like your ABC’s and 123, you know, but being I, I enjoyed reading”. Simon first displayed signs of delinquency when moving up into secondary school

where he met a group of friends and started smoking and skipping classes. However, he also said that they did not get into trouble and considered it to be “boys just being boys”.

Simon failed to take any of his exams at school and articulated the reason for this being “Because. Recruiters came to the school, army recruiters and on the off chance, I just went over to the career’s office. I passed the initial ... I can’t remember what the test was called now but. You know, the initial test actually to join up and it was successful, and I just thought that was my attitude. So just once. I passed my test to get in. Just thought I didn’t need education”. So, because he had completed the entrance examination for employment in the army, he did not think it was necessary to complete his formal examinations at school. He did not refer to taking part in extracurricular activities, clubs, or other organisations outside of the school settings, but he admitted to having a good group of friends both inside and outside of school whom he still considered to be friends now.

The second participant, Gavin, spoke explicitly about his experiences with formal education. He said that he enjoyed school but revealed that he “was subjected to bullying and sexual abuse by a teacher” whilst in his secondary school. Something that he had now come to terms with; he said that he had dealt with the trauma that this negative experience had initially caused. Despite the trauma he still maintained that his experience of school was a positive one and that he “finished with 5 GSCE’s”. He went on to Further Education where he “gained one A-level” although he did not say what this was in. He also admitted that it was whilst in FE where his relationship with drugs developed, whilst socialising with the group of friends that he socialised with at college. He stated that this was normal within his social setting.

In comparison Sean who took part in the pilot study, who had not displayed any signs of criminal behaviour and understandably had no contact with the criminal justice system, said of his educational experiences, “Teachers weren’t engaging, and it was a strict structure. Enjoyed sports and outdoor pursuits with the more practical subjects” He was more engaged in subjects that were practical by their nature, such as woodwork, metalwork, and motor

vehicle. It could be assumed that Stuart was engaged in extracurricular activities from his comments about playing sports and other activities within the school, and that he was engaged with activities outside of the formal education setting of school, such as sports. Outdoor training and youth clubs also occupied his time. He also states that he had a number of good friends and peers who also engaged in social activities both in and outside of the school setting. He subsequently left school with several qualifications at level two.

Sean's engagement in his activities can be effectively contextualised through the lens of Hirschi's social bonds theory, which posits that an individual's connection to societal institutions plays a crucial role in their behaviour and level of involvement. In Sean's case, his active participation in academic pursuits is intricately linked to the robust social bonds he has established, not only within the realm of education but also through his involvement in various sports and his familial relationships. Within the framework of Hirschi's theory, the four elements of social bonding – attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief – are evident in Sean's interactions. His attachment to peers and mentors in both the educational and athletic contexts fosters a sense of belonging and accountability. Furthermore, Sean's commitment to sports not only enriches his personal development but also reinforces his dedication to selfimprovement and achievement in academic settings. This dual engagement exemplifies how positive social relationships contribute to a well-rounded individual. Moreover, the influence of

Sean's family cannot be overstated. The familial support and encouragement serve as foundational pillars that enhance his motivation and drive to succeed. Through these interconnected social bonds, Sean demonstrates an integrated approach to his activities, underlining the importance of community and supportive relationships in fostering engagement and promoting positive outcomes in both educational and extracurricular endeavours. Ultimately, Sean's experience exemplifies the intricate interplay between social bonds and individual engagement, as elucidated by Hirschi's theoretical framework.

James was not so positive about his formal education and articulated this: "I went to a boarding school as I was from a service family. It wasn't a good environment due to a culture of bullying and other things happening. I also wasn't particularly good at school but still gained a few level 2 qualifications. I also played rugby and was a member of the combined cadet force (CCF) at school" (JA/SSI). He explained that he initially went to a primary school up until the age of 10, but from age 10 until the age of 16, he went to a boarding school facility for boys. Like Gavin, he also mentioned that there were cases of sexual abuse, but not personally to himself in this instance. James stated that he found it very difficult to make friends in and out of school. Nevertheless, he still engaged in extracurricular activities on offer whilst in school such as playing sports and in particular, rugby and the CCF.

Lee referred to his educational experiences as being enjoyable, saying, "Growing up I had multiple positive experiences with my education; I enjoyed all my learning experiences." He talked about starting in high school, but due to family circumstances with his family, he had to move schools twice. "I did move high schools twice due to my mother and father separating, this didn't affect my grades as I 'just got on with it'. This did, however, make me a quiet teenager as I faced some bullying as I moved schools. This I believe, affected my learnt behaviours later in my military development."

He believes that this did not affect his overall grades at school in formal examinations. However, he does say that "I just got on with it" whilst suggesting that "This did, however, make me a quiet teenager as I faced some bullying as I moved school. This I believe, affected my learnt behaviours later in my military development". Lee subsequently left school with 9 GCSE's which helped him join the army in a trade role with the Royal Engineers.

Both James and Lee articulated a less favourable relationship with their educational experiences and familial interactions. Their narratives reveal a backdrop of adverse childhood experiences, which significantly influenced their developmental trajectories. Both individuals reported having either directly endured incidents of sexual abuse or having witnessed such

distressing events occurring to peers. This exposure to trauma undoubtedly cast a long shadow over their psychological well-being and affected their engagement with educational institutions. Despite these challenges, both James and Lee sought to enhance their social interactions by participating in extracurricular activities. These engagements provided opportunities for socialisation and personal growth outside the traditional classroom environment. However, James specifically highlighted the substantial difficulties he encountered in forming friendships. This struggle may be indicative of deeper social and emotional challenges stemming from their adverse experiences, illustrating how trauma can impede the development of healthy interpersonal relationships. The interplay between their traumatic pasts and their efforts to engage socially underscores the complexity of navigating adolescent development in the context of past abuse. Thus, while they endeavoured to create positive social connections, the residual effects of their experiences necessitated greater support and understanding from their peers, educators, and families. Further investigation into the long-term impact of such experiences on their educational and social dynamics could provide valuable insights into effective interventions and support mechanisms for individuals facing similar challenges. The two of them did not experience the type of social bonds experienced by Sean, which could possibly provide answers for their subsequent behaviours, according to Hirschi.

All but Keith have continued their educational journey since leaving their military service. In Simon and Lee's case, they have undertaken formal qualifications as part of the rehabilitation process. Lee has taken several further education qualifications, such as "Level 1 NCFE – Interactive Media; Level 1 OCR – User I.T Skills; CFO - Veteran & subgroup Course,

Warrington Collage – Teaching Group Workshop (Multiple), FA - Leadership Course, CGL - Alcohol Awareness CGL, THH - Peer mentor Ambassador Graduation, Level 2 NCFE - Mentoring NCFE". Simon has also completed several qualifications stating "I've done you. Know just little courses. Like food and like suicide awareness and first aid that. Kind of thing". He explained that he had done food handling level 2 and the other courses led to him being a

mentor to others who had been in the same situation as him, Lee is also involved in helping others who have had problems with alcohol and similar other issues that he encountered as a result of the qualifications that he had completed as part of his rehabilitation. In Lee's and Simon's cases the qualifications that they have gained has led to them becoming involved in charitable work that helps other service leavers with their problems and given them a purpose and engagement that they have fully embraced. Simon said that it had helped him, "Yeah, it's helped me because it's been able to let me be a volunteer. Yeah. Which is quiet, you know, within the community".

Sean, Gavin and James have all gone on to complete Higher Education qualifications after military service. Sean has completed teaching qualifications; Gavin is currently engaged on a master's programme in logistics and management, and James completed a PhD in Sport and Physical Education in 2017, having completed undergraduate and post graduate degrees previously.

Theories for educational engagement

Merton's strain theory suggests that societal goals can lead to criminal behaviour, with social inequality creating a disconnect between these goals and the legitimate means to achieve them. This misalignment often drives individuals to commit crimes. Education plays a critical role in providing opportunities to reach these goals. Among the participants in this study, two individuals did not complete any formal qualifications due to personal circumstances: one passed an army entrance test and chose not to take their exams, while the other faced the tragic loss of his father. In contrast, three other participants left school with several level 2 qualifications before joining the military. Of these, one was involved in the pilot study and had no history of criminality, while the other two exhibited criminal behaviours and subsequently entered the criminal justice system.

On the other side of the argument is Hirschi, who challenges Merton's theory by examining why individuals refrain from committing crimes. In this study, the participants demonstrated engagement with education, with most achieving good formal qualifications. Only two did not complete their exams for the reasons mentioned. Their involvement extended beyond traditional education to include extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, and cadet programs. These experiences fostered informal education, instilling values like discipline, teamwork, and collaboration. Consequently, this engagement provided them with less opportunity to participate in criminal activities or anti-social behaviour.

Data theme 3 - Reasons for joining the military

There are many assumptions as to why individuals join the military, from wanting to move away from a 'broken' family to moving away from criminal activities or people that they may have been involved in. In this section, the participants explain their own reasons as to why they joined the branch of the armed forces in which they served.

When asked about his reasons for joining the army, Simon said "It was more of a job it was a job basically to join up. There was a job, there was a job, basically. To join up, and I just went with the flow once I passed the tests". He expressed that it was not his initial intention to join the army and said, "No, it wasn't nobody was more surprised than me when I actually passed the aptitude test to get in the Army so my family were like making bets about how long I would actually last in basic training".

Whilst Gavin explained that he wanted to join the military, stating that he "Wanted to be a pilot but eyesight wasn't up to standards, so tried to join RM failed at first attempt and got in second time but only lasted 6 weeks". He then joined the army and served in different regiments such as the Royal Logistics Corps, the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and finally the Parachute Regiment. Gavin's father served in the military, which had given him the experiences of military life, and he was determined to follow in his footsteps and serve in the military. This shone

through in his determination after his failed attempt to join and then the recognition that his first choice was not to his liking before joining another branch.

Like Gavin, James also came from a military family and had been encouraged by his father to join the same branch. James had been in the CCF at school; however, due to some conflict with his father explained that he “Joined the army against his parents’ wishes, who wanted him to join the RN, and so I Joined the army junior leaders from school”.

Sean said about joining the army “I joined after my O levels. Wanted to see the world and basically have an adventure. The Falklands war really sparked my interest in the Military”. Whilst Keith said that he was just passing one day when he decided to pop into his local barracks, and he was asked to go back the following week, which he did and signed up for service.

In summary, each participant provided unique reasons for joining the military, challenging the assumptions I and others had about their motivations. I often believed individuals joined to escape difficult family situations, involvement in criminal activities, or to leave impoverished areas. While two participants acknowledged growing up in high-deprivation environments, they did not cite this as a reason for enlisting. Instead, for two others, their decision to join was influenced by their experiences in military families, where their fathers had already served. This suggests that Merton’s and Hirschi’s theories may not be applicable to understanding such actions and motivations. However, Bourdieu’s work may be pertinent here as the two individuals from military backgrounds suggest being shaped by their environment, their habitus, and therefore the military culture they were part of from an early age.

Theory for joining the military

In analysing why individuals join the military, several key theories provide insight into their motivations. Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn values from role models. For Gavin and James, their fathers’ military service likely influenced their positive perceptions of

military life as an avenue for growth and adventure. Strain Theory, proposed by Robert Merton, indicates that some individuals may turn to the military due to societal pressures and limited opportunities for success. While not all participants came from difficult backgrounds, this theory highlights the complex interplay between aspirations and socioeconomic factors. Control theory, developed by Travis Hirschi, suggests that societal bonds help prevent deviant behaviour. For Simon, joining the army provided structure and purpose, marking a significant turning point in his life. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital explain how growing up in military families like Gavin and James's can predispose individuals to view military service as a natural choice, shaped by their upbringing. Identity theory. This theory considers how military service influences personal identity. For Sean, seeking adventure, joining the military represents a chance to develop a new identity and embody valour. In conclusion, motivations for joining the military vary widely, reflecting a complex mix of personal aspirations, familial influences, societal structures, and cultural contexts. This multifaceted analysis encourages further exploration of how backgrounds shape military choices.

Data theme 4 - Military life

The following quote was provided by Simon, speaking about his experiences of being posted to Germany, "I was posted to Germany, where beer was cheap and after we had finished our duties, it was straight into the bars drinking". He spoke about being a young lad and 'fitting in' whilst also having lots of money at the time. It was common behaviour to drink regularly because of having lots of downtime and no structure after the main work had been completed. Simon noted that everything led to drinking because it was cheap and was already part of the regimental culture, noting that "There was lots of free time if we weren't on exercise or training".

Simon also states that he didn't experience any form of combat and was never deployed on any peacekeeping duties. As a result, he never experienced any of the trauma associated with either of those duties or experiences.

Lee's thoughts on his military service noted that "I spent most of my young adult life in the military, I had learnt behaviours of my peers and instructors. It was animalistic. Get drunk, find a woman, serenade, show off and hopefully have sex so you can show off the next day when back in the barracks with the men. In the armed forces a lot was a generational ego alpha culture 'to be the best', best fighter, best looking, fittest, strongest and the best at your job role". He went on to give the opinion that "A lot of comrades helping each other in a very strong male orientated environment, a lot of egos and competition. Spread around by the commanders to get the best out of the men, who eventually went to fight in the war. On top of this was all the war training, aggression, tension, and a belief that we only live once, and we might die tomorrow 'so be it' attitude".

He notes that he also engaged in positive activities, including formal education programmes. He gained several qualifications whilst in the army, including English, Maths and IT at level 2, a City & Guilds in bricklaying and concreting, as well as NVQ in engineering and other qualifications in nutrition and gym instruction. He says that he enjoyed this side of army life and was enthusiastic about gaining the qualifications that he achieved.

He also stated that the excessive drinking was an attempt to fit in with his surroundings, and as this developed, he explained that he was "Living a life of alcoholism to self-medicate, 'to fit in'." More worryingly Lee also acknowledged that he had "no negative influences. Apart from Military Men, who trained me/ were my peers to be and act in these negative ways. I also have respect for these men as I needed to have my journey to be the man I am today. However, I shall never look back and I also know a lot of soldiers did the same as me to fit in, as I have talked and expressed my views across the veteran board. Failings on multiple levels. In and out of the military".

Gavin was deployed on operations, admitting that during "Tours of Bosnia and Northern Ireland, saw things in Bosnia that weren't nice". After joining the Parachute Regiment, he failed P Company, which meant he had to find another role. He transferred to the Royal Army Medical

Corps and did tours in Afghanistan in support of various regiments deployed in theatre, along with mentoring roles with the Afghan army. He was subsequently promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant and became an instructor. In all, he says that he served for 17 years and 6 months before being discharged, having served in some of the most volatile and traumatic theatres that the UK Armed Forces have been asked to work in.

Sean viewed his military life in a very positive light, fully immersing himself in the various opportunities it offered. He participated in numerous sports within the military, including rugby, judo, and skiing, and also took up open water diving while qualifying as a sailing day skipper. Sean engaged actively with the corporal's mess and its functions, emphasising that he experienced no negativity during his time in the Army, along with positive support from his family. He felt a strong sense of belonging in his regiment, appreciating the social aspects that came with it. Joining the junior leaders' regiment at 16, Sean believes that his education continued throughout his military career, and he holds an overall positive view of his experiences. Similarly, Keith reflected positively on his military service, particularly valuing his relationships with the officers. His only regret was not being deployed; despite applying for deployment during the Gulf War, he was assigned to backfill roles in Germany while being stationed in London with various reserve units. He described his service as interesting, mentioning pranks like stealing vehicles and providing illicit beer for mess functions. Yet, he still considers not being deployed his biggest regret and sometimes feels like an imposter because of it. James also joined the Army at 16 and had a mix of experiences during his service, but he managed to see the positives in each situation. Through his regiment, he earned numerous qualifications and developed a lasting passion for teaching and sharing his knowledge as an instructor. He served in Northern Ireland and the Balkans and participated in Operation Long Look, working alongside the Australian Army in various locations. However, he faced challenges, including a serious incident following an altercation at a mess function that led him to desert and join a military organisation in France. He also commented on the alcohol culture within the armed forces.

Overall, the participants shared a range of experiences from their military lives, with both positive and negative aspects. Lee expressed concerns about the negative influences of his instructors and the culture surrounding them, feeling pressured to conform. Simon echoed this sentiment, highlighting the lack of structure during downtime, which contributed to a heavy drinking culture. Whilst James also acknowledged the drinking culture, he credits his army experience with igniting a passion for education and becoming an instructor. Lee also focused on the educational opportunities encountered as a significant positive of military life. Sean remained entirely positive about his military service, fully engaging in activities from sports to adventurous pursuits like sailing and diving, viewing all aspects of his time in service positively. Gavin highlighted several positives in his military career, including promotions and training roles, though he also noted some unpleasant experiences during tours in Bosnia and Afghanistan without specifying whether they had a positive or negative impact on him.

Theories

Two participants expressed the need to "fit in" with the culture of their surroundings, particularly the military tendency to drink alcohol to excess. Merton's theory on conforming to social goals aligns with these experiences; they describe negatively the impact of such conformity on their lives. Bourdieu's notion that the environment shapes our interactions is relevant here, as these individuals felt compelled to assimilate into military culture or face isolation. One participant, Lee, discussed behaviours typical in this environment, such as acting tough, fighting, drinking, and flirting, while another participant, Simon, recalled the experience of a young soldier joining a unit that showcased their heavy drinking habits. These behaviours exemplify the social and cultural capital that Bourdieu describes. In contrast, Sean was highly engaged in both military duties and family life. This aligns with Travis Hirschi's theory and suggests that regular and active engagement with a range of commitments and activities can leave little room for delinquency or criminal behaviour.

The study, therefore, raises questions about the nature of military culture, especially during periods when soldiers are not deployed, working or engaged in training. Several conversations with people who had served in the army, including a senior non-commissioned officer (SNCO), pointed to a lack of structure during these downtimes, which seemed to contribute to risktaking and problematic behaviours, such as excessive alcohol consumption and violence. This individual shared concerns about troops being 'left to their own devices' during these periods, emphasising how such circumstances inevitably lead to increased drinking and fighting both at home and overseas.

Data theme 5 Reasons for leaving the military

The reasons that participants gave for leaving the military are as varied and diverse as those they gave for joining. Simon stated that he left because of his drinking and the disciplinary problems that it caused him. He took a redundancy package after a government defence review decided to reduce military numbers; by his own admission, he had become an alcoholic and so had decided to leave. He stated, "So I served 10 years out and because I had a drinking problem in the army, I got demoted twice and they offered me a redundancy package, so phase three redundancies came out then in 94". Simon completed some HGV driving courses as part of the redundancy package and intended to move into that field of work after leaving.

Gavin left after the army discharged him after 16 years of service; he was caught with prescription drugs and legal highs, having fallen into drug dependency and alcohol consumption. After leaving the army and his run-in with the justice system, he started working in the world of close protection in Qatar in the Middle East before leaving that role and returning to the UK and returning to education.

The pilot study participant, Sean, left the army to start a new career with the Police service and continued his educational journey. He also continued with his other roles in scouting leadership, British cycling and as a first aid trainer. James left the army by PVR, having encountered disciplinary problems and a run-in with the justice system and re-entered the

world of education. He said that his final role in the army had provided him with the inspiration to return to education, where he completed a Cert Ed and commenced working in the role of a sports coach and educator.

Keith became disillusioned with his role in the army reserves and left to return to his previous role in Civvy Street involving working with animals as a groom. He also worked in other roles that led him into criminality and brushes with the law and criminal justice system. Lee stated that he left because he “got made redundant in 2013, tier 3. From Germany as an AAPTl. As I missed my promotion board as I was training to go core. Been out 10 years now, never did no resettlement”.

In summary, as was previously stated that there were various reasons stated by the participants for leaving the military. One of the participants took redundancy, which was because of disciplinary problems due to his abuse of alcohol and recognised that he had become an alcoholic. One due to his drugs and alcohol abuse whilst serving, a problem that first arose earlier in his life, but he still served for 16.5 years in several roles within the army. Another left after disciplinary problems but returned to education shortly after his release. One more was made redundant after 10 years of service due to missing out on a promotion board. Each of them served a substantial amount of time in the military before leaving their roles. The pilot participant left to start a new career in the Police service and continue in education also. It has been previously discussed in this chapter that participants identified a lack of structure whilst they were serving, which caused them issues whilst serving, and there were negative influences upon their lives during their service.

Theories

Habitus dictates how individuals react and behave in an environment, and the culture within the military appears to have had an impact on the participants of the study. Some talk about doing things to fit in with their surroundings. Hirschi talks about things with which people are engaged that keep them from acts and behaviours associated with criminality. However, both

Simon and Lee talk about conforming to the culture that has led them to display these behaviours, which Merton talks about in his theory as to why people commit such acts. This is very much contrary to Merton's theoretical position, which refers to individuals conforming to societal goals and accepting the situation and the legality of reaching those goals of society.

Data theme 6 - Post military life

Simon's reflections on his post-military life reveal a complex interplay of personal and societal factors that contributed to his significant struggles. Following his departure from the armed forces, Simon experienced a cascade of serious life challenges that irrevocably altered his circumstances. Most notably, his marriage disintegrated, resulting in the dissolution of familial bonds, particularly his relationship with his children. This separation appears to have exacerbated his sense of isolation and perhaps contributed to his emotional turmoil. In recounting his experiences, Simon articulated the multifaceted reasons that underpinned his subsequent job loss. He described how these circumstances, combined with the psychological effects of military service, led to a downward spiral that ultimately left him homeless and living on the streets. The impact of these events on his mental health is significant; Simon candidly acknowledged that he was grappling with alcohol dependency, stating, "So, I came out of the army and I was already. I'd say I was already an alcoholic, but untreated and, you know, I hadn't recognised I was." This admission highlights a crucial aspect of his struggle—an inability to recognise his addiction at the time, suggesting a lack of access to support systems that could have facilitated his recovery and reintegration into civilian life. Moreover, the societal stigma surrounding homelessness and substance abuse likely exacerbated Simon's predicament, creating additional barriers to seeking help. As a consequence of these cumulative adversities, he found himself entangled in the criminal justice system, having been incarcerated for what he described as numerous minor offences. This cycle of incarceration compounds the challenges faced by individuals like Simon, perpetuating a state of disenfranchisement and making it increasingly difficult to break free from the societal and

systemic issues that contribute to their marginalisation. Simon's narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the critical need for comprehensive support systems for veterans, particularly regarding mental health and substance abuse, as they navigate the transition back to civilian life.

Theories on post-military life

Simon's experience can be analysed through several theoretical frameworks that illuminate the challenges veterans face during civilian reintegration: Trauma Theory. Simon's struggles suggest that the psychological impact of military service, contributed to his emotional turmoil and alcoholism, complicating his transition to civilian life. Social Dislocation, anomie, originally introduced by Durkheim and further developed by Merton and Hirsch's theory of engagement, highlights how a broken marriage and estrangement from an individual's children illustrate how life events can lead to isolation, making social support networks less accessible and exacerbating mental health and addiction issues. Merton's Strain Theory regarding the socioeconomic position of an individual, including the loss of employment and subsequent homelessness, which pushed Simon into financial instability, possibly leading him to engage in minor criminal activities, entrenching him in the justice system. Simon's lack of awareness about his alcohol dependency highlights common issues in addiction, emphasising the need for resources to support individuals in recognising and addressing their struggles. Stigma and Marginalisation Societal stigma against homelessness and substance abuse creates barriers to help, making it difficult for individuals like Simon to seek support without fear of judgment. These frameworks reveal the necessity for targeted interventions that address trauma, provide social support, and reduce stigma, crucial for aiding veterans in their reintegration process.

Data theme 7 - Drugs and alcohol

The prevalence of substance use, particularly drugs and alcohol, emerged as a significant theme among the participants in the study. In the case of Simon, he candidly acknowledged

his struggles with alcoholism during his military service, illustrating how his dependency on alcohol led him to experiment with various drugs to amplify the effects of his drinking. This admission highlights the complex interplay between substance use and coping mechanisms in high-pressure environments like the military. Similarly, Gavin's narrative provides a critical insight into the normalised culture of substance use in certain social contexts. He openly confessed to engaging in drug use during his college years, emphasising the perception that such behaviour was commonplace among his peers. This tendency towards substance use can often be traced back to the social dynamics of collegiate life, where experimentation with drugs and alcohol is frequently seen as a rite of passage. Gavin's substance use eventually culminated in serious consequences, resulting in his administrative discharge from the military. He was found in possession of a substantial quantity of prescription drugs and legal highs, illustrating a concerning trend that not only affected his military career but also reflected a broader issue of drug misuse within the armed forces. This pattern of behaviour – characterised by cyclical engagement with substances – appears to have dominated Gavin's life, impacting him profoundly both before enlisting in the military, throughout his service, and in the subsequent phase of his life post-discharge. The narratives presented by both Simon and Gavin underscore a disturbing pattern of substance abuse that transcends individual choice, pointing to systemic issues within military culture and societal norms regarding drug and alcohol use. These findings raise significant questions about the support systems available to service members grappling with addiction and the broader implications for mental health and well-being within the military context. Understanding the complexities of these experiences is crucial for developing effective interventions and support mechanisms for individuals facing similar challenges.

Simon (SSI) stated, "It was, but I think I think so. We we talk about you know. Alcoholics being of a different type of of addicts. Also, you could go out now and have to turn on what you do, but you could go out now on two or three pints and go home right I wouldn't. If I put two or three pints down, there just to start the big. You know, it's like mad sessions". He carried on

“So I came out the army and I was already. I'd say I'd say I was already an alcoholic, but untreated and, you know, I hadn't recognised I was. And and I started to take amphetamine, speed to make socket. At first so I could drink longer but. Eventually, the the drugs took over the alcohol and. Which also turned me into a different person or psychotic. I would imagine things that weren't happening and. I would make up make up scenarios in my head that weren't real”.

Another person involved with drugs world was Keith, who declared that he never touched them himself, or sold them, he collected drug debts for criminal gangs in the London area, often with violence being used, which is how he became involved in the CJS. He has subsequently left his former area to escape from these criminal activities and distanced himself from the individuals that he was working for.

All the participants were explicit about their alcohol use whilst serving and post-service, although people like Simon said they had now been off alcohol and drugs for a number of years after receiving support. Lee also spoke about returning to his army days after leaving the service, stating “I now worked away just like the army, which I missed (weirdly). I was back to my old Army Behaviours, drinking, sleeping around and being totally selfish”. Alcohol dependency had once again become a problem for him, despite the fact that he did not like what had happened during his time in the army.

Lee also admitted, “I was dying inside full-blown alcoholic, while spending as little time as I could with the family (two kids, loads of noise). Now, one year on and working away as far as I could across the country. Drinking a Litre of spirits per day. Ignoring phone calls, short answers if I did pick up the phone. The times I did go back to play happy family. I was intoxicated, not connecting, masking all my feelings, and playing the pity card”.

There were other anecdotal instances of people becoming dependent on alcohol, such as an individual serving in the RAF who was posted away from their family and said they had nothing

in common with those they were working with due to age and rank, which left them isolated and started to drink heavily. As a result, they received an administrative discharge after getting involved with the CJS for drunkenness. They were now receiving help as a result of alcohol dependency.

Another anecdotal story came from an individual who had served in the Royal Navy, who said his marriage had broken down as a result of alcohol abuse after leaving the service. He said that even though he knew he should not have been doing it and telling himself that it was wrong, he found himself opening can after can of beer. He sought help after one of his friends had told him that he had issues with alcohol, to my knowledge this individual had not committed any crimes but it is just another story of a serviceman who started drinking whilst serving and carried it on post service and although not served time in prison he displayed traits of delinquency and at certain time what he considered to be criminal behaviour and acknowledged the fact that “he had been very lucky”.

The participants talked about the culture within the army as being responsible for the problems that they have encountered. Lee talks about “I had learnt behaviours of my peers and instructors. It was animalistic. Get drunk, find a woman, serenade, show off and hopefully have sex so you can show off the next day when back in the barracks with the men. In the armed force a lot was a generational ego alpha culture ‘to be the best’, best fighter, best looking, fittest, strongest and the best at your job role. A lot of camaraderie helping each other in a very strong male-oriented environment, a lot of egos and competition. Spread around by the commanders to get the best out of the men, who eventually went to fight in war. On top of this was all the war training, aggression, tension, and a belief that we only live once, and we might die tomorrow ‘so be it’ attitude. All this I now know is wrong, as it is a form of my Complex PTSD.

Simon also talked about the culture and his experiences, “Drink alcohol related. You know a lot of it was fighting stupid fights and criminal damage and just also another parade and being

late for parade, all the things you'd get in trouble for if you have been a heavy drinker, basically. The habitus of the armed forces, and in particular for these men who had served in the army, clearly thinks it is responsible for the issues that they have faced both in and out of the armed forces. It seems to have had a negative impact on their behaviour.

The whole culture appears to demand that individuals conform to it from recruit training to the end of service and extends into post-service lives.

Theories on drug and alcohol misuse

The study explores the intricate relationship between substance use, mental health, and the pressures faced in military and social environments. It highlights cases of Simon, Gavin, Keith, and Lee, demonstrating that substance abuse often acts as a coping mechanism for stress among military personnel and college students. Key perspectives include coping mechanism theory, which could see Individuals, like Simon and Gavin, turning to substances to manage stress, leading to increased dependence. Bourdieu's theory of habitus and capital supports a social learning theory that Gavin's story illustrates how peer behaviours in college can normalise substance use. Goffman's theory of institutionalisation and the importance of systemic issues narratives reveal the systemic problems in military culture that perpetuate substance abuse, exemplified by Gavin's discharge due to drugs. The theories of Bourdieu, Hirschi and Merton also support this. Anxiety and isolation can be exacerbated by Military postings, which can cause emotional isolation, leading to heightened alcohol consumption. Transitional Stress, Lee's experience emphasises the stress of transitioning to civilian life, potentially prompting maladaptive coping strategies like alcohol dependency. The findings underscore the urgent need for support systems for military personnel and veterans, including integrated care programs, peer support networks, educational campaigns, and resources for those transitioning to civilian life. A comprehensive approach addressing both individual and systemic issues is essential for tackling substance use complexities in these contexts.

Data theme 8 - Criminal behaviour and activity

Each of the participants was openly explicit about the crimes that they had committed that led to them being involved with the CJS and incarceration. In Simon's case, he talked about being an alcoholic upon leaving the army, which then resulted in his marriage breakdown and him living on the streets. He explained that he had been sent to prison for "Petty crime such as criminal damage", although he admitted that his subsequent prison sentence was handed down after several repeat offences of criminal damage.

Keith's criminal activities had centred around violence as a result of his working for criminal drug-dealing gangs in the London area. As a result of this and brushes with the law, he decided he had to move away to separate himself from the life that he had got involved in and moved as far away as possible to avoid getting into further trouble. He has since settled in the Northwest of England but admitted he still has problems getting into violent altercations because of his nature and earlier years.

James found himself in trouble and was incarcerated due to violence and desertion. Whilst serving in the British army, he was involved in a violent altercation whilst at a mess function where he struck an officer. As a result, he absconded and deserted to France, where he joined their Foreign Legion. Upon being found out what he had done, he was returned to the UK, where he was incarcerated for the assault and subsequent desertion.

Lee, having spoken about being an alcoholic, then talked about the series of events that would lead to his incarceration, saying "Lock down came, I lost my job, I had some good savings, moved back to (name of hometown)²⁹ with my mother. Not long after, as the pubs were still open, I managed to hide my alcoholism / mental health from my mother and quickly moved in with a woman/drinking partner and eventually new girlfriend".

²⁹ The name of the hometown has been removed from his direct quote to maintain anonymity.

Lee further disclosed his alcoholism and what it did; he stated, “Drinking a Litre of spirits per day. Ignoring phone calls, short answers if I did pick up the phone. The times I did go back to play happy family. I was intoxicated, not connecting, masking all my feelings, and playing the pity card (It’s all my fault). I eventually realised I couldn’t role play through this no more as her family started to see the cracks (mentally broken), but I couldn’t show it as I am ex-military, and I will be seen as weak. So, before they found out I was an alcoholic and broken, I left.”.

He then went on to reveal the offences that he committed and the reasons why “That turned south quickly as we then started to do drugs together, drinking large amounts, and that is when the fighting started. Verbally and physically. It got that bad that I came home the night out of my birthday in 2022 and physically assaulted (girlfriend's name) till I broke her collarbone. I still didn’t feel any remorse for (girlfriend's name)³⁰ even when I tried to do the right thing and hand myself in to the police. Lee was handed down a prison sentence of “2 years and 8 months” for the assault on his then girlfriend.

Each of the participants referred to the culture that they had come from in the military for the descent into criminal behaviour, with the exception of Keith. Simon blamed the lack of structure that he experienced in the army for his alcoholism and subsequent crimes. Lee also looked at the negative experiences that he had in the army for his own criminal acts after leaving. He stressed throughout that the culture of the army had had a negative impact on him and what he did after leaving. The habitus or the ecology in which they had existed had followed them after leaving. Gary also said that the culture of life in the military had been responsible for the violence that he had used and the cause of his incarceration.

In contrast, Sean, who took part in the pilot study and had no connection with criminal activities, stated that his experience had been a positive one with lots of opportunities that he had taken

³⁰ The name of his girlfriend has been removed to maintain anonymity.

whilst serving in the army. He still retains his links with the regimental association post service and has been involved in lots of community roles also.

Theories for criminal behaviour

The participants discussed their criminal activities that led to their involvement with the criminal justice system and incarceration. Simon, an alcoholic after leaving the army, faced imprisonment for “petty crimes” like criminal damage, which he committed multiple times. Keith’s violence stemmed from his work with drug-dealing gangs in London, prompting him to relocate to the Northwest to escape his past, though he still struggles with violent tendencies. James was incarcerated for assaulting an officer in the British army and subsequently deserting to France. He was returned to the UK and jailed for his actions. Lee, another alcoholic, recounted how his drinking and mental health issues spiralled after moving back home during lockdown. His relationship with a drinking partner deteriorated, culminating in a violent incident on his birthday that led to his conviction for breaking her collarbone, resulting in a prison sentence of 2 years and 8 months. Most participants attributed their criminal behaviour to the military’s culture. Bourdieu’s theory of capital and social reproduction describes the issues suggested here; Simon and Lee cited its negative impact on their lives post-service also. In contrast, Sean had a positive experience in the military, finding opportunities and maintaining connections with his regimental association.

Data theme 9 – Homelessness

Only Simon and Lee expressed that they had been homeless at some point. In Simons’ case, he had been homeless living on the streets for approximately 10 years. He says that he puts his excessive use of alcohol and drugs was responsible for his becoming homeless, citing ‘I would make up make up scenarios in my head that weren’t real. Of course, my wife, my wife at the time. She was the one who suffered through this, and she divorced me and got. I came

home from work one night, actually, and it was just like a big troop of police with my bags in my hand and they said You've gotta go she's got a restraining order. And I left from the house, and I was just living on the streets from there I didn't care'.

Lee stated that "I bought a caravan and spent most of my time travelling or in jail." After leaving the military. He also said, "Been out 10 years now, never did no resettlement. As I have multiple qualifications and didn't know what I wanted to do".

Theories on homelessness

The experiences of Simon and Lee highlight the complex interplay between personal choices, societal circumstances, and the consequences of mental health and addiction. Simon's story illustrates how substance abuse can create a cascade of negative events, leading to the loss of relationships, stability, housing and a lack of engagement with other aspects of society that could have prevented this decline (Hirschi). His mention of creating scenarios in his head suggests a struggle with mental health issues, which may have compounded his substance use and contributed to his homelessness. The fact that he acknowledges the impact of his actions on his wife indicates a level of self-awareness, even if it came after a significant loss.

On the other hand, Lee's experience reflects a different trajectory. His time in the military, coupled with the lack of resettlement support, reveals systemic issues in how veterans' transition back to civilian life (Bourdieu and Hirschi). His decision to buy a caravan could suggest a desire for freedom and independence, yet it also points to a possible avoidance of responsibility or a means to escape from the challenges he faced. Lee's lack of direction in utilising his multiple qualifications highlights how a lack of guidance and support can hinder individuals from reintegrating successfully into society. Overall, both narratives showcase the varied factors contributing to homelessness, including personal choices, mental health, addiction, and the systemic failures in providing support for those in need. They serve as a

reminder of the importance of comprehensive support systems that address both individual and societal challenges to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

Data theme 10 – Structure

This theme was highlighted by the participants of the study and several people who now support veterans through service charities. One individual spoke about the lack of structure in the army, as that was their own background, having served for a number of years and gone through the rank structure before leaving and joining the charity. He said, “that if soldiers were not on exercise, training or deployed into theatre, then there was too much downtime”. He also said that this downtime was filled with going out and drinking alcohol. Simon told the story of how he “needs to have a structure”, he too reported that the lack of structure and too much free time whilst serving led to his problems with alcohol and the disciplinary issues that he had spoken about previously and the ensuing problems that he faced upon leaving the military which resulted in the breakdown of his marriage, becoming homeless, being arrested and consequently being sent to prison.

One individual who served in the RAF, who is not part of the study but wanted to tell their story, stated, “I would finish work first at 4, then 3 and eventually I didn’t go in at all. I would go back to the block where I would start drinking. I had nothing in common with anybody in there, so just drank and drank in my room. I was good at hiding it. The Police arrested me for being drunk, getting off a train.” They also stated that they had been posted away from their family and put into a barrack block as the block JNCO as she was a more senior rank and had nothing in common with the other occupants and would spend most of the time on their own in their room. They stated that it took a while for their senior to realise that they were not attending for work and to ring them. At the time of speaking to this individual, they were awaiting their discharge from the service due to their problems with alcohol ad been placed on a rehabilitation course at Tom Harrison House.

One more individual also wanted to tell their story but again did not want to participate in the study talked about their time whilst serving in the Royal Navy and the problems that they had after leaving; he said that he had problems with alcohol whilst serving, but this then spilled over into civilian life after he left. He said, "After leaving the military, I would be sat at home telling myself that (opening another beer) it isn't right, I knew that it wasn't right, but I would carry on drinking regardless". He was open about how he came to realise that he was having problems and how a friend had approached him about the amount that he was drinking, which then led to him seeking help after becoming involved in the CJS because of his drinking.

Lee talked about his own experience of what it was like being in the army, saying "I had learnt behaviours of my peers and instructors. It was animalistic. Get drunk, find a woman, serenade, show off and hopefully have sex so you can show off the next day when back in the barracks with the men. In the armed force, a lot was a generational ego alpha culture 'to be the best', best fighter, best looking, fittest, strongest and the best at your job role. A lot of camaraderie helping each other in a very strong male-oriented environment, a lot of egos and competition. Spread around by the commanders to get the best out of the men, who eventually went to fight in war. On top of this was all the war training, aggression, tension, and a belief that we only live once, and we might die tomorrow 'so be it' attitude".

These structures and cultures appear to be embedded throughout all of the branches of the military and in fact they have recently been documented in the media across a number of prominent court cases that have highlighted such problems in the military such as the way in which females are treated.

Theory on structure

Participants in the study, along with individuals supporting veterans through charities, highlighted issues related to a lack of structure in the military, specifically in the army. One former soldier shared that downtime during service often led to excessive alcohol use,

ultimately resulting in personal problems, including marriage breakdown and homelessness. Another individual from the RAF recounted how isolation and drinking became a coping mechanism after being posted away from family. A Royal Navy veteran reflected on how his alcohol issues persisted after leaving the service, acknowledging the negative impact it had on his life and seeking help after a friend intervened. Lee discussed the "animalistic" behaviour within the army, driven by a culture of competition and aggression, which shaped many service members. Such cultural issues have been recently spotlighted in media coverage of prominent court cases, particularly concerning the treatment of women in the military.

The concerns articulated by the participants can be directly associated with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as the environments in which they inhabited during their military service contributed significantly to the challenges they faced, which subsequently permeated their post-military lives. This transition often precipitated difficulties in their reintegration into civilian society, leading to issues of identity loss and social isolation, as noted by Hirschi. Furthermore, this phenomenon can be analysed through the lens of Merton's strain theory, which posits that the absence of viable employment opportunities upon their departure from military service exacerbated these challenges.

Data theme 11 - Rehabilitation

Simon, Gavin, and Lee all went through a rehabilitation process to recover from alcohol and drug problems that they had encountered whilst serving and post-service of the military. Lee talks about his recovery, saying “, I also know through the help of the veteran charities which I linked in with while in jail (vets HQ), that there are other veterans just like me. Facing the same problems and there are so many success stories (If they can do it, I can).

Since being out of jail I have carried on my road of recovery, mentally, physically, and emotionally 'Mind, Body & soul'. Getting the help and guidance of Tom Harrison House (THH Veterans Rehab) which, I managed to get the funding for a 3-month (self-journey) through the aid of counselling and therapeutic group Activities provided by THH. I joined a huge network

of recovering veterans and graduated from my rehab as an ambassador of THH and mentor of alcohol & drug misuse with multiple qualifications. This gave me a new pathway on my journey. Which I continued to get my level 2 counselling, level 2 mentoring, and level 2 teaching all while volunteering at THH Spending a full 8 months volunteering to help other veterans like me”.

Simon reiterated the importance of his rehabilitation journey “So I was in prison. And I've seen a sign on the wall saying it basically said if you are a veteran then ring this number, and we can help you. So, I initially rang you because I was thinking I'm gonna get out. And it wasn't, and it was to an organisation called Project Nova, which is part of walking with the. Wounded, I believe. To deal with veterans that have been in the judicial system”.

He went on say that “so after letting her down about half a dozen times and met a lady, within a week she brought me here (at this point Simon indicated to THH in Liverpool) to a community breakfast one morning on Monday. And the following week was in. I was actually on the programme”.

He then talked about the rehabilitation process, having saved and changed his life, “Massively It's it's not not being dramatic when I'm saying it's. There's absolutely saved. It's saved my life. It's changed everything for me, it's. You know, I've got, it's just it changed everything. It is. I don't think at 55 I'd still be around now doing what I did. If I was, you know, if I had just carried on that path. I think I lost my life at some point. So, when you say it saves lives this place. You know, it's not been over dramatic. Saying the House definitely has, you know. In the six years I've been around Tom Harrison House I've never committed a crime, I've never drank. Well, I have drunk once, sport. That was I. Had one blip. In 6 1/2 years, and that was. That was almost three years ago. So yeah, side, you know”.

Gavin also arrived at THH after he was referred to the service, where he also took part on the rehabilitation programme at the centre. After successfully completing his rehabilitation, he has

recently left and is now enrolled on a Higher Education course of study in Birmingham at postgraduate level. He also acknowledges the importance of the service at Tom Harrison House and the life-changing role it has had on him.

Lee also referred to how he has now reengaged with both sides of his family and said, "I've not thought about anything else other than working to provide for my kids and getting back to (his hometown) to be a more present father in their lives. Which I am now successfully doing. Connecting my family on multiple levels with each other and with me and my children.

Simon also stated that he was now on good terms with his former wife and had started seeing his children once again.

Both Lee and Simon talked about interventions that could have happened whilst they were serving in the army that would have altered their lives. Simon said, "I think if there had been an intervention at any point along that path. If there had been. As there have been someone that would actually recognise me instead of punishing me with my alcohol problem because of my because obviously my my behaviour had to have consequences have to be punished. But instead of while doing that, why not? Try and. help me at the same time and help me with the problem. You know instead of just instead of just punishing. Help you know, do something about it as well. Recognise that I'm an alcoholic and get me help with it. Yeah, you know, be that therapy or you know. Point you know, I mean I I I didn't have to know. I I thought Alcoholics Anonymous or something like old tramps went to that they didn't know about. You know? I have no idea about, about about the 12-step programme and all things like that. It wasn't until I actually came to Tom Harrison House, I get to learn about all this I learned it. Was help I. Learned from it. You saw things just. I was offered absolutely no help with my addiction whatsoever. It wasn't even recognised".

Theories on rehabilitation

Simon and Lee talk about the culture of the military being responsible for the position that they found themselves in. They talked about the lack of structure during their service, and in its place was alcohol, violence, and sex. This was the ecology that they lived in, and they were consumed by that culture. If we were to look at this through the lens of Merton and the strain theory, then these two men were conforming with their surroundings to avoid being isolated. The military environment takes away individuality and forms a body of 'men'³¹. This body are trained to fight as a group and are encouraged to do things socially as a group to improve cooperation and a fighting collectiveness to enable it to achieve its objective. The troops were engaged in their regiment and all that entailed promoting an Esprit De Corps³².

From the leadership perspective of an officer

I have been fortunate enough to be able to seek the opinions and experiences of two highranking officers in Colonel Duane Fletcher, retired (RAMC) of the British Army, and Squadron Leader Steven Bryce, retired Physical Education Officer (PEdO) (RAF). Both now work in the third sector for organisations that support veterans on their onward journey after leaving the armed forces.

It is important to point out that both officers arrived at their destination from different points. Col Fletcher rose through the ranks to be commissioned, where he reached the rank of Colonel; he started off as a junior leader, just as some of the participants of this study had. He also points out that the people that he commanded were different to normal soldiers as they were doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and other health professionals who were highly trained in their professions and had much more to lose if they were to step out of line.

Sqn Ldr Bryce had a degree already, and after training as a teacher in Liverpool, he joined the

³¹ The term body of men is frequently used despite there being females present. The military is still pretty much male dominated even though there are many females in front line positions across many roles.

³² A sense of unity or togetherness, pride in belonging to a group with a shared purpose.

Royal Air Force as a junior officer in what was then the Physical Education training branch. Once that trade had been discontinued, he went on to serve in several leadership roles before being posted at the Defence College in Shrivenham as an instructor, rising to the rank of squadron leader.

Sqn Leader Bryce reflected upon what he did as an officer to ensure the well-being of the people under his command, stating, "I built up a culture of belonging to the badge, the section, the flight or the squadron. Everyone contributes to the same aim, no real rank, just trust and integrity. From my perspective as the OC, leading by example and demonstrating compassion, empathy, letting my troops know I believed in them, and would support them 100% both professionally and in their private lives, I would always be there for them" he went on to also say "if I got to the stage where if I their actions disappointed me, they would have been gutted."

Colonel Fletcher expressed, "I served in a time where the drinking culture of the services was being addressed due to bad media, working with healthcare specialists, things are slightly different; however, there are a couple of things we did at the unit".

He went on to talk about the strategies that he employed to keep those in his command in line saying that he would "Use Part one orders to remind people of their legal and professional responsibilities. Monday to Thursday, the bar was closed at 2200hrs, following the duty JNCO walking around and making sure all was ok, anyone drunk or difficult was reported and spoken to by the RSM the next day, Officers to the Adjutant. Any functions that were held had an agreed later start the following day, days such as Corps Day, and other celebrations also had to have a late bar applied for to the CO, who made the final decision based upon commitments. My Squadron was made aware from day 1 that I was a non-drinker and did not tolerate drunkenness due the effect it has on unit cohesion. Although I was very firm, I did also take into account the reason why sometimes people needed to blow off steam; however, if they appeared at work drunk, they would be disciplined. Alcohol and Smoking were a regular topic

at 1/4rly unit Healthcare meetings, and people with issues were discussed. The garrison did have a very stringent process for dealing with drunks outside the unit also, arrested reported to the RMP and charged appropriately”.

He discussed the fact that he did not drink and how, when he attended functions in the mess, all of the toasts were made using alcohol and people tried to coerce him into doing the ‘right thing’ to which he replied “I can make the same toast with water” which in view of the culture is very admirable. He set a good example to his troops whilst also recognising that people do need to ‘let their hair down and decompress’ but as long as they did it responsibly and did not affect the efficiency of the unit, he did not have an issue. Like Sqn Ldr Bryce he endeavoured to lead by example to his troops, but he admits it was much easier as he was dealing with healthcare professionals.

The anecdotal evidence presented by Squadron Leader Bryce from the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Colonel Fletcher from the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) offers compelling insights into the pivotal role that effective and positive leadership plays within military contexts. Their experiences illustrate that leadership is not merely about the exercise of authority or command; rather, it encompasses the ability to inspire and cultivate a supportive environment that enhances the morale and well-being of personnel. Positive leadership is crucial in fostering a strong team ethos, which can significantly mitigate many of the challenges and stresses that military personnel face throughout their service. In a high-pressure environment such as the military, where individuals often encounter adversity, uncertainty, and rigorous demands on their physical and mental resilience, the promotion of a cohesive team dynamic becomes essential. Leaders who prioritise communication, collaboration, and mutual respect empower their subordinates, not only enabling them to develop professionally but also supporting their psychological health and personal development. Furthermore, the creation of a positive team ethos can lead to increased cohesion among unit members, which is particularly important in fostering trust and camaraderie. This psychological safety allows personnel to voice concerns,

offer suggestions, and engage in problem-solving without fear of retribution or dismissal. Consequently, when service members feel valued and supported by their leadership, their overall job satisfaction and commitment to their roles may improve, which in turn enhances operational effectiveness. In summary, the reflections shared by Squadron Leader Bryce and Colonel Fletcher underscore the critical importance of positive leadership in the military. By nurturing a constructive team ethos, leaders can not only alleviate some of the inherent challenges faced by personnel but also contribute to an environment that promotes resilience, adaptability, and sustained performance over the long term.

Summary of the findings

I have tried to contextualise the findings by using several theories that explore the participants' ecology, the space in which they exist. For each participant, I have explored their family background and its composition, their friendships and relationships. Further to this, I have investigated the strains and stressors that they may have encountered in their journey through life from their developmental years through their military service and beyond post-service, including the prison sentences that they have served and the offences that they have committed. I have also examined the reasons that prevent people from turning to crime, such as engagement with family and friends, education, any organisations that they may have been involved with, including sporting ones and other roles in society that they may have held.

This is all covered by their educational experiences, not just formal. As I have already discussed in the previous chapters, it is accepted that there are three different formats, which are those of formal. Informal and non-formal. What is learned at school, the curriculum forms only a small part of what we know; the majority is derived from what our parents, our friends and colleagues, and the places in which they exist. There are other areas that we learn that are based around schools in the informal setting, known as the hidden curriculum, such as manners, timekeeping, responsibility and discipline.

The overall findings regarding the family settings, no matter how they were composed, were generally positive, with positive relationships discussed by each of the participants. Simon and Lee's parents were separated, but Simon expressed the opinion that although times were hard, his upbringing of him and his siblings was good. Lee also spoke about the good times that he had, especially the holidays that he had with his parents prior to the breakdown of their relationship, but he considers himself to have been lucky to have had two very good, supportive families when his parents got married to their respective new partners. Gavin and Gary were from service families and moved around quite a lot as their armed forces parents were posted. Nevertheless, despite some disagreements between Gary and his father, it was a positive relationship and one in which he was fully engaged. Gavin also expressed that his relationship was a good one. Sean from the pilot study stated that he had good, supportive parents who helped him and still do. The loss by Keith of his father had a dramatic impact on his life.

Each of the participants, except for Gary, said that they had a good group of friends. However, this can be a subjective and contentious area. In the case of Simon, he discussed how he started smoking and bunking off school with his friends when he was in secondary school, and they remain friends up until the present day. Sean also discussed having a good group of friends, who were a positive influence upon him during his developmental years.

Lee discusses how the friends he had during his early years came from the same council estate background. He argues that this changed when he joined the army. He recognises that his peer group in the army were the only negative influence that he has had in his life. Drinking to excess, fighting and womanising, he describes the influence that this group had on him.

The importance of good leadership in setting a good culture was apparent after talking to both Squadron Leader Bryce and Colonel Fletcher, no matter the type of people under their command. It is important that those individuals are treated with empathy and consideration, with an understanding of how individuals are coping with not just their military role but also in

their private lives. It is also apparent that those leading make themselves aware of issues that may be affecting the people in their command and to make themselves available to them.

Chapter 8

Discourse

The aim of this study was to achieve three primary objectives. Firstly, it sought to understand the educational experiences and criminal justice situations faced by veterans participating in the research. Secondly, it aimed to explore educational transitions throughout their lives. Thirdly, the research intended to provide guidance and policy recommendations regarding missed educational opportunities. By examining three educational formats, the study has attempted to analyse how and why veterans exhibit delinquent and criminal behaviours. Existing research assumes a correlation between low educational attainment and criminal behaviour. Ashcroft (2014), for example, suggested a link between poor educational attainment and criminal behaviour. I, too, subscribed to some of the assumptions made about veteran offenders, such as low educational attainment, coming from areas of high deprivation and from broken families, causing them to join the military as a means of escaping their former lives. Again, my assumptions were based on those who joined the army because of my own experiences in the military and the bias that I had built up regarding the issues.

Initially, the research project focused on understanding the life experiences that contribute to the overrepresentation of veterans in the prison population of England and Wales. However, the focus shifted as the research progressed.

It has been essential to acknowledge and confront my biases through the analysis of the research data. Despite the shift in focus, the central theme has remained focused on the veterans' experiences, allowing them to articulate and reflect on significant events that led to their criminality. Furthermore, the research has employed sociological theories to analyse the reasons behind their choices, actions and behaviour. Utilising Bourdieu's framework, we have

considered the cultural and environmental contexts of their lives. Merton's strain theory has been applied to identify societal pressures contributing to criminal behaviour, whilst Hirschi's engagement theory has provided insight into factors, such as family involvement, societal participation, employment, and hobbies, in the effective deterrence of criminal activity. The study also investigated the impact of the three educational formats in relation to the participants' lives. It examined their experiences with formal education – how they perceived schooling, further education, and higher education before, during, and after military service. These aspects combined have been crucial in understanding why individuals may turn to problematic behaviours and crime. Furthermore, the study addressed informal educational experiences, such as time management, discipline, and communication skills. Lastly, it explored the influence of non-formal education, considering how family, peers, and friends shape thoughts, behaviours, and potentially delinquency.

I was asked a very pertinent question by one of my supervisors at the beginning of the research: what did I want to achieve by doing this study, was it just for the sake of getting the PhD, or did I want to make a meaningful impact? The answer was that I wanted to make an impact, which would give a better understanding of soldiers and veterans and their reasons for joining, leaving the army, and eventually getting into trouble and becoming involved with the CJE. The focus remains the same; the contributing veterans have offered reflexive lenses through which to understand these phenomena; in conjunction with the application of sociological and criminological theories, the study has put their experiences into a useful and meaningful context.

It was clear from the start of the study that this topic is an important area of research due to a lack of qualitative research that recognised and explored the voices of veterans themselves. This study hopefully contributes towards addressing this gap by exploring the voices of 6 participating veterans and their perceptions of pressures and events that led to their incarceration. Ideally, this detailed knowledge will be useful in helping servicemen and women in the future.

There is a commonly used term describing the process of those joining and leaving the armed forces “People are trained to be soldiers and kill, but they are not trained to be civilians”. When an individual joins the armed forces, they are stripped of most of their individuality; they are assimilated into a culture, it’s not like the Borg in Star Trek ... nothing as drastic as that. However, Mottershead (2019, p. 247) refers to this and notes that ‘how being in the military led to a reconstituted identity’ and argues that this ‘lends itself to allowing the individual to be assimilated into the total institution of military life’. Mottershead cites Goffman’s (1961) work, which described the process of ‘deculturation’ which involves the embedding and acceptance of the military culture, its habits, mannerisms, and language whilst breaking down any previous existing moral limitations.

Although Goffman’s work was predominantly about those in mental health institutions in America, in his work ‘Asylums’, there are widespread references to all types of institutions, ranging from convents, to prisons, boarding schools, and the military as well as psychiatric institutions. Goffman argued that there were – indeed are – common features to all of these institutions. During his work, Goffman suggested those powerful institutions strip individuals of their former identity before resocialising them. One question that this work starts to address is the impact of military institutions and culture on the self-perceptions and behaviour of soldiers once they become part of military organisations.

Assimilation means that as individuals they wear the same clothes, walk from place to place as a body of men and women (marching), live in communal barrack blocks with up to 20 others in a room; not eating is a punishable offence and can see an individual who misses a meal put on a “fizzer”, in my own branch of the services, the RAF terms a “252”, or in plain English charged with an offence under military law that could see them put in cells and possibly punished by being given extra duties. They must learn a whole new language and way of life. When they go out socially as a unit, one person is usually designated as a “shark watch”, whose role it is to detect threats and be alert to the danger on behalf of the rest of the group.

They are trained to think as one body; if one individual does something wrong, everybody from that group is punished collectively. They are also trained how to handle weapons and to be aggressive in the face of the enemy which they will be required to kill.

Goffman (1961) cited by Mottershead (2019) also notes that the ethos of deculturation is apparent by the presence of confidence, courage, organisation, and the concealment of fear. This was very much in evidence in the participants of this study. Lee referred to this whilst completing his timeline and during the interview. He talks about the need to be the best at fighting, drinking, being a soldier and womanising; he also identifies that not doing this could have led to isolation. Simon also noted that by taking part in drinking and all that it entailed could have seen him being isolated and 'not one of the boys', if he hadn't participated. Evidently, this led to complications and problems for him personally in later life.

These aspects of military culture were mentioned by others during the study, notably those who now work in the third sector supporting veterans. They talked about having lots of downtime when troops were not on exercise or deployed on training, or exercise, or in theatres of conflict or peacekeeping duties. I also witnessed this behaviour for myself whilst serving in the RAF Police, both on my own station and when deployed; there was a huge culture of drinking that invariably led to fighting or sexual encounters. Whilst serving in the Falklands, I noted that each section had its own bar, amounting to around 50 extra bars on the Mount Pleasant Military Complex, as well as the official NAAFI bars and shops. However, there were stipulations as to what those bars could sell; other ranks' bars could only sell beer and port, and the SNCO's and Officers' bars could also sell spirits. Furthermore, the study by Fossey (2010) identifies alcohol consumption across all branches of the military.

Themes and gaps in research

Family

As has already been discussed, there were several themes that were attributable to veterans committing criminal behaviours and activities that led them into contact with the CJS. These include the families in which they were brought up in. It has been highlighted by prominent researchers in the field of this study, such as MacManus and Wessley (2011), Fossey (2010), Moorhead (2021), and Murray (2013), are the voices of the veterans themselves. They accept that the statistics alone only form a very small part of the puzzle, and without the experiences of the veterans being told, there will not be a full understanding of the issues that they face and why they turned to criminality or why veterans form the largest cohort of the prison population.

The data produced by this study has dispelled some assumptions and uncovered some dominant reasons as to why such behaviours might manifest. It also addresses some of the issues raised by other research that has been conducted over the past 20 years.

The analysis of data gathered from timelines and semi-structured interviews revealed twelve prominent themes. A significant area of interest identified in this study, which challenges existing literature, is the role of family. Research indicates that family dynamics can serve as precursors to delinquency and, consequently, criminal behaviour. Each participant reported a strong connection with their family, asserting that they experienced positive upbringings characterised by appropriate guidance, and none of them had encountered substantial trouble in their youth. Most participants described having supportive friendships outside the familial context, with the exception of Gary, who highlighted difficulties in forming friendships during his early years due to frequent relocations associated with his father's naval service. To provide stability in Gary's life, his parents enrolled him in boarding school, aiming to introduce a consistent male role model. Three participants – Simon, Lee, and Keith – identified as having

been raised in areas marked by deprivation during a period of escalating unemployment. Despite the challenging circumstances, each emphasised that they never faced significant hardships; their parents ensured that their essential needs were met. Another theme discussed by researchers regarding the roots of criminality relates to the educational attainment of veterans who have engaged in criminal behaviour and subsequently faced incarceration. This notion aligns with Merton's strain theory, which highlights that individuals may resort to crime when they perceive a lack of opportunities for secure, skilled employment. The American Dream posits that hard work and education are pivotal for attaining good employment and the associated material wealth. As previously noted, three participants perceived their backgrounds as rooted in deprivation. Simon articulated a generally positive outlook on his primary education, although he expressed dissatisfaction with his secondary school experience, which led to increased absenteeism and the onset of smoking social habits. Simon did not attain any formal qualifications as he opted to join the army after completing the initial entrance exam. Lee similarly reflected on his positive educational experience, completing school with Level 2 GCSE qualifications, which facilitated his entry into the army in his desired field of engineering. He continued his education while serving, achieving several additional Level 2 and 3 qualifications alongside military trade credentials. Both Gavin and Gary also graduated from their respective educational institutions with commendable Level 2 qualifications, enabling them to secure favourable positions within the military. Gavin pursued A-levels at college prior to military service, although he was unable to join his preferred branch due to medical constraints. Notably, Ashcroft (2014) indicates that the educational entrance requirements for military service are relatively low. However, it is acknowledged that candidates for the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy often surpass these minimum requirements, while those enlisted in the army, particularly in infantry regiments, typically exhibit educational attainment at an entry level of 1, equating to the numeracy and literacy proficiency of an eight-year-old. The findings of this study reveal that only two participants left school without any formal qualifications, whereas the remaining four participants achieved satisfactory Level 2 qualifications.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)

Although there is nothing explicit about any adverse childhood experiences from the men that took part in this study. The UK National Health Service talk about there being no agreed definition of what an adverse childhood experience is, it accepts that most studies that have explored this issue have joined a set of experiences to explain what it is. Which are in addition and inclusive to the CDC list are:

- verbal abuse
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- physical neglect
- emotional neglect
- parental separation
- household mental illness
- household domestic abuse
- household alcohol abuse
- household drug abuse and
- incarceration of a household member

Each of the men spoke about the positives in their family life including those whose parents had divorced and separated. Each of them had experienced at least some form of ACE's during their early years. Two of them had experienced their parents separating with Simon and Lee both stating the positives that they experienced with Simon talking about although it was difficult with money being tight, he had a good upbringing with his mother and siblings. Lee also spoke about the positives of having two loving families when his mother and father married after their divorce. He spoke about having two sets of holidays and having different siblings.

However, Keith identified the death of his father as being responsible for him not returning to school to complete his formal education and gaining qualifications. Both Gavin and James originated from service families with their fathers both serving in the Royal Navy. James said that he found it very difficult to make friends due to the many moves that his father made during his service. He was eventually placed in a boarding school to give him some stability.

However, he did talk about sexual abuse occurring at the school, but not to him personally. Gavin was explicit about being sexually abused by a teacher in one of his schools but insisted that this had not affected him. He was also explicit about taking drugs during his days at sixth form but insisted that this was normal during that period. So, although none of the men identified themselves as having adverse childhood experiences, there is evidence from their responses through their timelines and interviews that there is a case that they had.

Delinquency and Criminal activity before military service

Previous occurrences of criminal activity pre-service have also been used by other studies, such as Treadwell (2011) and other prominent researchers, to understand the reasons as to why veterans commit crimes. The likelihood of somebody returning to crime upon leaving the armed forces is a perfectly plausible assumption to make. However, this does not appear to be supported by the data from this study. Each participant was open about early life experience; not one of them revealed that they had committed any criminal acts prior to joining the military.³³

Nevertheless, there are several instances that could be considered as acts of delinquency that came to light during the data collection. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to ascertain whether such acts might be considered precursors to criminal activity later in their lives. Simon admitted

³³ The only exception was Keith who explained that he had previously been arrested for manslaughter; however, it was one of his friends that had beaten a man to death. Although Keith was arrested by the police, when the case came to trial, he was acquitted of all charges due to the testament of several witnesses who saw what had happened.

that when at secondary school, he and a group of friends would smoke and “bunk off” school.³⁴ Simon described this behaviour as ‘boys just being boys’, dismissing it as ‘doing nothing illegal’. Lee spoke about being a kid from a council estate and having no boundaries. Gavin was explicit about his use of drugs whilst at college doing his ‘A’ levels, he stated that this was

something that everyone did at that time. However, Gavin was later administratively discharged for possession of drugs from the army, and this seemed to be an issue afterwards.

Alcohol

There was an acknowledgement from all participants that there were problems with alcohol consumption during their time in the army; this, of course, confirms the findings of previous research. Fossey (2011, p. 10) spoke about the acceptance and encouragement of alcohol consumption in the armed forces; my own personal experiences corroborate the research and participant comments. The consumption of alcohol is clearly an issue in the military, and this is culturally entrenched.

Simon claims that his alcohol consumption during military service was directly attributable to the problems that he encountered after leaving. He admitted to being a full-blown alcoholic whilst in the army but explains that he was able to hide this. He got into trouble whilst serving for various military offences, including fighting. After leaving, his drinking led to the use of drugs, and by his own admission, this gave him the capability to drink more. Eventually, this led to the breakdown of his marriage, leading to homelessness and his subsequent incarceration.

Lee also admitted to being an alcoholic due to his service in the army, which was exacerbated when he left the service and, like Simon, began to take drugs, which then led to other

³⁴ Bunk off or wag school meaning not going to certain classes or to miss days of school altogether.

criminality and, like Simon, his incarceration. All respondents noted that it was typical to drink heavily when posted; they all admitted to finishing work early before going back to the accommodation block and drinking.

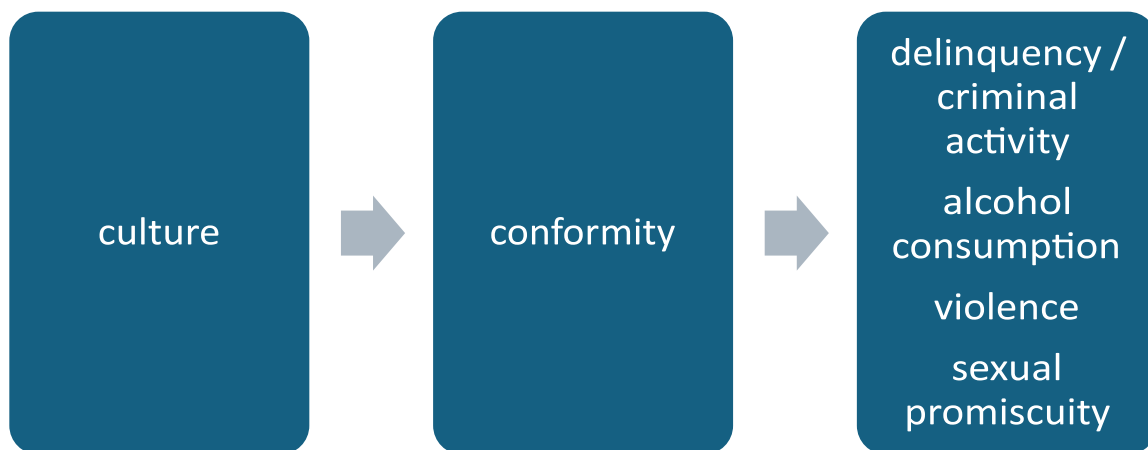
Deculturation but not 'Reculturation'

The themes of structure and culture run throughout the course of this study; from the outset, people have referred to military culture and the problems that this presents. There have been abundant references to risk-taking whilst serving in the military. One of the staff members who had previously served in the army and now works for one of the organisations supporting veterans, stated that there was a structural issue relating to culture. When soldiers are not on deployment or exercise, they tend to lack meaningful structure. He contended that this is one of the main problems that leads to the excessive consumption of alcohol – lack of structure and purpose, boredom, and the entrenched expectation to engage in excessive alcohol consumption.

During the course of the study, both Simon and Lee referred to the culture of the military on several occasions; they clearly implicate this as one of the main causes of their subsequent issues, including their imprisonment. Lee held very strong views about his peers and instructors whilst serving in the army as being the only negative influences in his life. He talked about the need to be the best soldier, the best drinker, the best fighter and sexual prowess. Simon also claimed that the culture of drinking in the army was responsible for him becoming an alcoholic, and therefore the latter problems encountered since leaving.

The study has used the strain theory of Merton and the social control theory of Hirschi to put many of the previous findings into context. In this sense, the compulsion to obey and 'fit in' within the army places a powerful strain of conformity on soldiers. The wider culture and environment also place them in places and spaces that apply status and credence to engaging in certain behaviours. It has already been discussed about how individuals are decultured and stripped of their former identity, whilst being resocialised. Mottershead also wrote about this in

his paper, supporting this by using Goffman and his theory to validate this concept. In this sense, the social control inherent to the culture of the army appears to be part of the problem. The more that they conform to the entrenched culture, activities and expectations of the army, the more susceptible they become to losing control of alcohol.



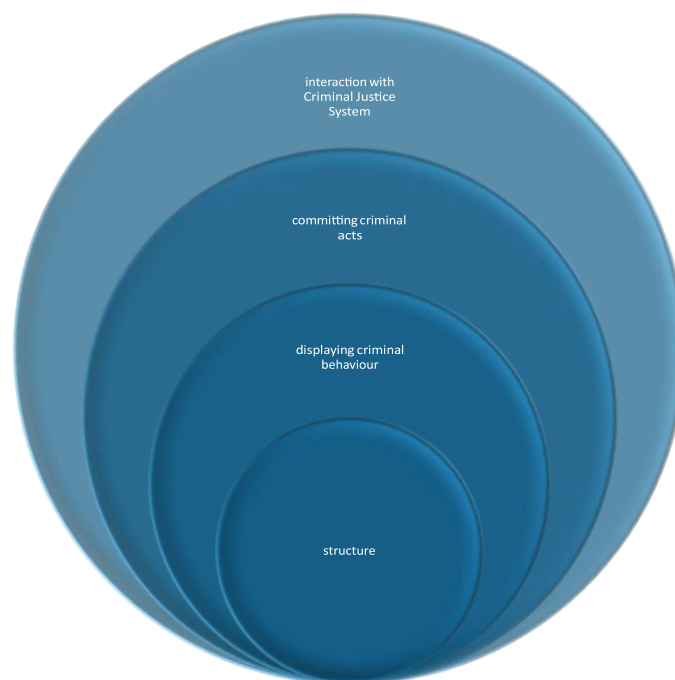
Therefore, conformity and active engagement within military culture, along with its hierarchical structure seems to powerfully shape individuals into participating in delinquent behaviour, such as excess alcohol consumption, violence and promiscuity. In this study, Simon and Lee explained that the culture of drinking whilst serving in the army was responsible for their respective descents into alcoholism, the breakup of home life, and subsequent use of illegal drugs.

Within military contexts – more so than civilian contexts – the idea of engaging in and practising non-conformity simply is not an option that can be realistically (or safely) entertained. Non-conformity and “eccentric” behaviour would not be easily accepted or tolerated within the army. This again chimes with Merton’s strain theory, and how nonconformity in relation to societal norms would lead to isolation and criminality. Either way, either conformity or non-conformity appears to chisel pathways and journeys towards problematic behaviours and potential criminality. However, Bourdieu theorised that the habitus in which we live dictates the social norms that we live by. Therefore, whilst far from easy, the social norms identities and everyday

expectations within the army could be altered and adjusted to emanate very different values, statuses and expectations.

It appears that once an individual becomes assimilated and embedded into military culture, it becomes very difficult to de-acclimatise and effectively return to civilian life. Whilst attending a future for heroes course at Brathay, one of the individuals expressed the opinion that he did not like 'civvies' because they did not understand. The retort by the facilitator was "do you understand them?". Thought-provoking but very true. There are Career Transition workshops to prepare servicemen and women for the world of civilian employment, but there are no workshops to help with the reintegration back into civilian life and the cultural transitions and very different expectations that this entails. Even if this were to be 'taught', it would still be very different to the process of experiencing a military-deculturation and civilian enculturation.

Structure and criminality.



Another theme that arose during the study was the lack of meaningful structure in the army. Individuals repeatedly reported that there was no structure when the troops were not engaged on exercises or deployed into theatre. They stated that once soldiers had finished their daily

tasks, they were free to do whatever they liked, which generally led to drinking. This is not necessarily unique to the army, however, in the RAF, there is a constant focus is to keep aircraft serviceable and the need to maintain the integrity of the UK's airspace. Navy personnel also tend to have detailed and regular tasks that reduce the amount of 'empty time' and therefore drinking time.

The different types of roles that the three branches of the UK armed forces perform appears to have an impact on the amount of time that individuals within their respective ranks perform. Whilst alcohol plays a huge part across all branches, the evidence collected during the course of the study appears to support the view that ex-army individuals on rehabilitation programmes declare this as a significant issue.

I met and conversed with another individual – ex-RAF – at one of the hubs during the course of the study; whilst their characteristics didn't met the inclusion criteria, it is still worth recounting that they had been posted away from their partner (who was also serving in the RAF) at the other end of the country, and put in charge of a barrack block inhabited by Leading Aircraftsmen/women or Senior Aircraftsmen/women of junior rank and age. They reported that they had nothing in common with the group and became isolated as a result. The individual then took to drinking heavily in their own room, which in turn led to alcoholism and missing going to work. They were then arrested for drunkenness by the transport police and charged with criminal offences.

Leadership

It is clear that those in roles of responsibility and leadership must provide meaningful structures for those in their command. Both Squadron Leader Bryce and Colonel Fletcher divulged strategies that they had used to ensure the well-being of the people in their charge. Sqn Ldr Bryce talked about instilling a positive culture of belonging, trust and integrity within the corps, making it necessary for all to actively contribute to this aim. He also talked about their role importance as OC was to lead by example, and that he demonstrated empathy and supported

teams and individuals not just in their role in the service but also in their private lives. He made sure that he was available for them to discuss issues that they had.

Colonel Fletcher talked about overseeing healthcare professionals, describing his role as being different, especially in comparison to those who lead infantry regiments. He talked about refraining from issuing his troops mundane and repetitive tasks, such as putting tents up” just to occupy their time. He ensured that they were tasked with completing Continuing

Professional Development to ensure that they remained up to date in their professional roles. He, like Sqn Ldr Bryce, felt that it was important to actively lead by example and encouraged those in his command to uphold the values of their profession as health care practitioners, in addition to those of the regiment in which they served. He applied the rules and regulations across all ranks and enforced them accordingly. Pointedly, he disagreed with the idea that unacceptable behaviour in the officers’ mess should be classed as high jinks and unacceptable acts committed by junior ranks being subjected to disciplinary sanctions.

Morals and ethics

In his work on morals and ethics, Emile Durkheim suggested that different professions tend to follow different sets of morals and ethics (Durkheim, 2019, p. 8). Nevertheless, he also states that ‘there is no form of social activity which can do without the appropriate discipline’. He differentiates between several different professions, such as doctors and the medical professions, having different values from bankers. It is clear that those serving in the military follow – and require – unique sets of morals and ethics, because they are in place ultimately to protect the rest of society, potentially involving extreme violence and the taking of other human beings’ lives.

He refers to the necessity of stability and the core role of effective leadership within an institution. In this case, by referring to the leadership of the UK armed forces, leadership can start as low down as a corporal in the military and as far up as the highest office rank, which

historically is Field Marshall. It is up to those people in charge to effectively shape and enforce the predominant code of morals and ethics for the rest of those serving. This brings us back to the role of culture. Based on the data provided by all of the participants in this study, the culture in the UK military, and specifically the army, is not as it should be. Current leadership morals and values within the army prioritise the need for troops to be ready to go to war at a moment's notice. This is true and understandable, as soldiers might well be asked to go and fight wars, and this requires not only physical strength but also mental strength. However, there needs to be a realisation that the current constituent parts of army culture produce negative effects on soldiers and eventually wider society in general. Treadwell's bleak prediction of what would follow when troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan returned home and left the military. He predicted that more victims would be created by traumatised people returning home and perpetuating this battle-fuelled culture of excessive alcohol consumption, violence and misogyny. He suggests that the greater the strength of the structure of an organisation, the greater the force of its morality and rules. He also notes the opposite, whereby if the institution or society lacks stability and cohesive strength, it becomes easier to defy and escape its discipline. In the case of the military, there is a specific hierarchical structure in place to ensure that the values of the organisation are communicated and enforced. These rules and regulations are also set out in parliamentary acts such as the Army Act 1955, the Navy Act 1957, and the Air Force Act 1955 in the UK. It is not necessarily the hierarchy and discipline that is been brought into question by this study (as new leaders also become part of an already existing culture). However, the hierarchy is tasked with reinforcing and conveying the morals, ethics, codes of conduct and culture throughout the chains of command.

The participants have identified a problem with army culture; as such, this remains to be an issue that requires serious consideration and further attention and action to ensure that future servicemen and women do not suffer the same. Obviously, the hierarchy of the military is not

responsible for individuals once they have left the army, but it does seem clear that their negative and destructive behaviours developed whilst serving.

I would argue that we all have a responsibility to highlight and attempt to deal with these issues, as serving soldiers at some point will be discharged to return to general society and their communities and families. As such, it is important to consider ways of challenging and reconstructing army culture at all levels, to nurture and set in place new guiding principles and statuses, to generate a new habitus of morals and ethics that value, prioritise and shape very different and constructive identities and behaviours.

There appear to be two extremes related to military service, which are total control of personnel and at the same time, not enough. This could be seen as a paradox, but participants have highlighted a distinct lack of structure within certain aspects of army life, specifically when people have finished their core jobs or tasks. It is here that they experience a significant and damaging lack of structure, which is filled with alcohol and other negative behaviours.

Themes for engagement

Sean from the pilot study had not been involved in criminality or criminal behaviour; it is therefore possible to use his life course as a comparator to other participants. By doing this, we can identify a continuum of meaningful engagement and ongoing professional development which appears to be lacking from the other participants. Similar to Hirschi, we can argue that each soldier should be expected to develop, follow and complete a continuum of development and engagement to reduce the risk of becoming involved in pre-custodial behaviours and criminality. Obviously, education in all its guises could be considered here, in conjunction with early life and pre-service, military service, and post-service life. A continuum of personal development and progression could be used to enhance confidence, purpose, dignity, and personal integrity.

By exploring the notion of military culture conformity and the social norms that led to participants becoming involved in risk-based pre-custodial behaviours and eventual criminality means that rebelling or revolting against these is not an option. What is required is a fundamental change in formal, non-formal, and informal education values and practices throughout the army regiments and ranks. In this sense, notions of personal growth, dignity, and professional progression beyond life in the army need to become embedded as part of a new leadership and culture regime.

Recruitment by region and areas of multiple deprivation

Another area that has been highlighted by this study is the way that the military targets areas of high deprivation to recruit personnel. This was noted by Ashcroft and in other studies; MacManus and Wessley have also written about the correlation between areas of high deprivation and crime. In Table 1 (see Appendix C), army recruitment figures are illustrated for those joining the army are shown. In table 2 (see Appendix C) the top 20 areas on the multiple deprivation index can be seen. It should be noted that the participants in this study all identified issues with homelife poverty and all served in regiments of the British army.

It can be extrapolated from the tables provided in Appendix C that the largest area for recruitment into the army tends to be the Northwest, which includes the cities of Manchester, Liverpool, Preston, Chester and the larger towns of Warrington, Crewe, Bolton, and Halton (the combined local authority for the towns Of Widnes and Runcorn). The second largest intake area is the Southeast region of Aldershot, which is considered to be the home of the British army.

These statistics prove to be very interesting because the region with the most areas of deprivation according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation is the largest recruitment area for the army. However, it also seems to have lower crime rates than the national average.

The participants in this study served prison sentences for a variety of different reasons, with two serving a custodial sentence for violence, one for persistent offences whilst being homeless, one for drug offences and one for desertion. Only the two that served sentences for violence are indicative of the reasons as to why most veterans serve custodial sentences.

It has been suggested that low educational attainment levels are prevalent within the army by Ashcroft (2014) and more recently by a report from FiMT (2024). All but two of the participants in this study had left school with good level 2 qualifications and had continued with their education whilst in the military, accruing qualifications at level 2 and 3. All but one (Keith) had re-entered education post military service, going on to achieve qualifications in Higher

Education and continue to be involved in education now. Two of the participants – Lee and Simon – are involved in supporting veterans who have also been in prison, having gained the relevant qualifications in counselling and mentoring. As such, this study does not seem to support the notion that low educational attainment is responsible for pre-custodial behaviours, criminality and incarceration.

Since becoming engaged with supporting fellow veterans, both Simon and Lee have rehabilitated themselves, become clean of alcohol and drugs and have put criminality behind them. Both have re-engaged with their families and are in supportive relationships. Simon is now back on good terms with his wife and children and reports that he has only had one slip in six years. Gavin has returned to education to do a postgraduate degree after his rehabilitation and is looking forward to a positive future. Keith has moved away from the people that he was involved with to escape the criminality that he had become involved with and is getting help through a veteran's hub and with the help of his partner. None of the participants have been engaged with the criminal justice system, and none have received any further custodial sentences. This clearly belies underlying or untapped potential and abilities in all of the participants in this study.

A key point raised by participants in this study was the lack of wider educational or training resources made available to them whilst serving. One participant expressed the opinion that if they could have accessed the educational resources provided by places like Vets HQ and Tom Harrison House, whilst still in the army, then they would never have been in the position that they found themselves in, leading to incarceration.

I would argue that the Ministry of Defence needs to accept more responsibility for the men and women who serve in the UK armed forces. There needs to be more emphasis on education whilst serving in the army, and for those leaving the services as part of the transition process.

Deculturation and 'Reculturation'

It has been discussed how those individuals joining the armed forces are stripped of their former selves and how military culture becomes embedded in them. At no point are servicemen and women ever "re-cultured" to enable them to return to civilian life. Simon spoke of the need for rehabilitation services, such as those that he received at Tom Harrison House, to be accessible whilst serving. He stated that if he had had access to such services, he would not have found himself in the situation that saw him lose his family, become homeless, and be incarcerated. After being referred to Tom Harrison House and going through their rehabilitation process, Simon and Lee have become engaged with their families and successfully completed several courses that have seen them become mentors to servicemen and women who have found themselves facing the same issues that they had faced. They now use their own experiences to help others.

In the context of non-formal education, it is evident that the cultural and environmental factors experienced by participants significantly influence their values and behaviours. The participants reflected on the military culture that they encountered during their service and the lasting impact it has had on their lives following their departure. For instance, Lee highlighted the negative influences exerted by his peers, noting that the behaviours associated with alcohol consumption, aggression, and promiscuity were particularly detrimental. He candidly

acknowledged a return to these experiences after leaving military service. Similarly, Simon emphasised that his time in the military coincided with the onset of alcoholism, which subsequently contributed to his difficulties post-service. The training of recruits in the army is characterised by the absence of a formal curriculum, resulting in predominantly informal learning processes. Trainees acquire skills in relation to drill procedures, personal presentation in uniform, and self-care practices. This informal education fosters essential qualities such as self-discipline, punctuality, and adherence to authority. As previously discussed, negative attitudes towards formal learning seem to play a significant role in military life.

Teamwork and collaborative functioning are integral to military culture, and punitive measures are enforced to cultivate a sense of camaraderie among individuals. While such methods were historically viewed as character-building, contemporary perspectives within military recruit training regard them as less acceptable.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Research has consistently raised concerns regarding the involvement of veterans in the criminal justice system (CJS), particularly focusing on those who are incarcerated. Notably, veterans constitute the largest professional cohort represented within the prison population. Statistical analyses have indicated that the predominant offences committed by veterans are of a violent and sexual nature. However, these statistics illuminate only a fraction of the underlying issues, failing to uncover the reasons as to why so many veterans get involved in risk-taking and destructive behaviours and subsequent involvement in crime.

The findings from this study provide a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of 6 veterans, most of them having served prison sentences. This research offers a platform to articulate the challenges and obstacles that precipitated their journeys into criminality, the CJS and incarceration. There remains a notable paucity of qualitative research in this area; hopefully, this study contributes significantly to enhancing our understanding of the multifaceted issues that impact and confront soldiers as they are demobilised prior to returning to civilian life.

The study offers valuable insights into the experiences of veterans and the antecedent factors that influenced their criminality. Prior research has often perpetuated the assumption that veterans' incarceration is primarily linked to mental health issues stemming from combat exposure, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This assertion has been challenged, as only one participant in this study reported experiencing PTSD, although only two had direct combat experience – one during a peacekeeping operation in Kosovo and the other in Afghanistan.

Researchers such as MacManus and Fossey have proposed alternative causal factors, including familial issues and low educational attainment. However, the findings of this study appear to contradict these claims, as most participants left school with commendable Level 2

qualifications and actively engaged in educational opportunities both during and after their military service.

Concerning familial and social relationships, participants described mostly positive experiences within their family environments and friendship circles. Regardless of the diversity in family structures, they characterised their upbringing as being supportive and nurturing. This challenges the prevailing notion that veterans' offending behaviour is primarily attributable to mental health concerns, such as PTSD, low educational attainment, or pre-existing family issues. Overwhelmingly, participants attributed the emergence of pre-custodial and criminal behaviours to military culture and acknowledged alcohol consumption as a significant factor.

Culture and deculture

Preceding chapters have illuminated a persistent theme throughout the study, i.e., the negative impact of military culture on participants. Specifically, a culture that reifies the norms of alcohol consumption, aggression, and hypermasculinity. Notably, Lee articulated his negative experiences within this cultural environment, and Simon emphasised his descent into alcoholism through this. Both participants indicated a significant deficiency in available resources to support their well-being during their time in service.

There needs to be a three-pronged approach to effective transition for service personnel. In the RBL (2014), it was recommended that there should be more opportunities given to servicemen and women regarding formal qualifications and the tackling of the issues of alcohol misuse. It was suggested in the report that issues should be approached in the final 12 months of service. So, there needs to be interventions in place to tackle such issues in that important phase of an individual's military service. Finally, there needs to be a shift in culture as the current culture of the military appears to be toxic and needs to move away to enable all service personnel to transition back into civilian life effectively. this must be led from the top-down approach.

It is also of the greatest importance that those in positions of responsibility and leadership provide a meaningful structure for the people in their command in order to improve the culture in whichever branch of the military that they serve, be it the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy, or the army. They need to take responsibility for their troops' health and wellbeing, whether this is physical or mental. These troops are embedded in a culture, and that culture is embedded into them. Goffman's study does not address the impact that this may have upon the wider community, but Treadwell predicted a bleak picture for those servicemen and women returning to 'civvy street' and the future victims of their yet-to-be-committed crimes.

Responsibility for personnel must start with the recruitment process; Lord Ashcroft highlights the low educational standards required of individuals upon entering the services, and he states that this is a particular problem in the army. He contends that it is not viable to raise these entrance standards due to competition from other employment sectors. It has been highlighted by some participants of the study and anecdotal evidence from others who have served in the UK armed forces that there is too much downtime if an individual is not on exercise or deployed on operations. This leaves them with no structure in their work life, which then runs into their private life. This seems to cause issues with alcohol and other associated problems, such as violence. This downtime could be better used with compulsory education opportunities in areas such as maths and English to improve the life chances of those individuals who lack level 2 qualifications in literacy and numeracy.

The recruitment process should also be more aware and consider any special educational needs (SEN) and emotional behavioural difficulties (EBD) that prospective recruits may have in order to support them not only during the recruitment stage but also during the course of their military career and beyond. This was mentioned in Fossey (2010) as a possible cause for concern regarding disciplinary issues and subsequent behaviours leading to delinquency and criminality. Therefore, it is important to make sure that military service does not exacerbate these conditions and lead to disciplinary issues for those in the armed services.

There should also be a compulsory education programme implemented for individuals to at least reach level 2 in numeracy and literacy to enable them to have at least the required level of qualifications to gain employment outside of the military. There also needs to be a system that accredits individuals for the skills that they have gained whilst serving, such as leadership at different levels, problem-solving, and other important relevant skills that they have outside of the need for them to be promoted. There also needs to be more promotion of the educational allowance that servicemen and women receive whilst serving and the ELCAS fund after leaving.

One point that was raised during the course of this study is that the Ministry of Defence must accept responsibility for the physical and mental well-being of its servicemen and women before they leave the armed forces. This should not be left until after they have left their respective branch and left it to the NHS and the third-sector charities to pick up the pieces. This may be implemented as part of a transition process that not only looks at the world of work and employment but also reintegration back into society in general. Problems such as alcoholism and such issues should be addressed before an individual leaves the military. One suggestion was that the rehabilitation services provided by Tom Harrison House, Healthier Heroes in Lancashire and Vets HQ should be utilised whilst people are still serving. They have lots of experience and have been successful in this area.

To facilitate the successful reintegration of servicemen and women into civilian life, it is imperative to establish a structured program that encompasses both deculturation from military norms and re-culturation into a civilian culture. The ongoing discourse revealed that military institutions often strip individuals of prior identities, enforcing a comprehensive assimilation into military culture. Accordingly, a reverse process is essential to assist individuals in reintegrating into civilian life. This transition could be effectively incorporated into the final six to twelve months of military service, aligned with existing career transition programs, to ensure a more supportive and holistic approach to reintegration.

It is contended by the FiMT (2024) report that the recruitment of 16-and 17-year-olds straight out of school is detrimental to their wellbeing as they are deemed to struggle both physically and mentally with the demands of military service. It is highlighted by Fossey that they are also more likely to consume dangerous amounts of alcohol than their civilian counterparts. It is also discussed that this cohort is more likely to leave the armed forces as early service leavers ESLs. It is also noted by Fossey that recruits are not screened for any Special Education Needs (SEN) issues such as ADD, ADHD, Asperger's, Autism or any other listed problems. They are not screened for emotional or behavioural disorders that they may have experienced during their formative years, as they may be exacerbated by military service, as proposed by Fossey. The armed forces should refrain from targeting this group for recruitment or put special measures in place to safeguard them.

As a result of the mid-1990s defence review, the military hospitals at Ely, Wroughton, Halton, Aldershot, and Portsmouth were closed, leaving Hasler in Portsmouth and the mental health unit at Catterick Garrison as the only military medical provision available. However, these two units have now also been closed, leaving only a small unit at RAF Brize Norton as the only Mental health unit available. All military medical provision is now provided through sections based in NHS hospitals; there are regional rehabilitation units situated in stations or garrison medical centres which also provide primary care services. Joint hospital groups (JHG) that are embedded in NHS hospitals and the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine situated in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, which was the hospital military casualties were evacuated to from Basra, Iraq and Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. There is also a new Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Stanford Hall that now replaces the unit at Headley Court in Surrey. Mental health provision is conducted through departments of community health (DCMH's) and upon leaving the forces through NHS provision, such as the Pennine Trust and Mersey Care, which covers from Liverpool to Manchester. There are also charities such as Tom Harrison House, Veterans HQ and Healthier Heroes that support veterans' welfare needs.

There have been positives with the introduction of Op Nova, a programme that assists the armed forces community that comes into contact with the Criminal Justice System. Simon and Lee were both signposted by Op Nova representatives to assist them when leaving their incarceration. There are also the Op Fortitude and Op Courage programmes aimed at those at risk of homelessness or those who have become homeless and for those with mental fitness issues. There is the Veterans Gateway that acts as a portal for all of the needs of servicemen and women, bringing together third sector organisations with statutory ones to help. Unfortunately, this still seems to be convoluted and difficult to navigate and understand.

This study supports the findings of the RBL (2014) report into those in the criminal justice system and recommends that there should be more educational opportunities afforded to service personnel to enable them to find future meaningful employment. The skills that service personnel gain whilst serving should also be given formal recognition. If the military continues to recruit 16- to 18-year-olds into the ranks, then these people should be safeguarded as any young person would be if they were to attend college. There should be procedures in place to protect them from the rigours and demands of military service. It also supports the views on alcohol consumption and recommends that addiction services such as those provided by Tom Harrison House and Healthier Heroes be made available to individuals who are still serving. These services have proven to be very effective. It is better and more prudent to prevent than it is to cure the problem in the long term.

As discussed above, the culture of the military appears to be toxic, which needs to be changed. The culture of alcohol, violence and misogyny needs to be dealt with by those in command. It is all well and good to say that these people are trained to fight and be violent in theatres of conflict, but there should be a demarcation of when this becomes unlawful, such as the treatment of women in the services.

Recommendations for future studies

There has been much weight afforded to the Ashcroft (2014) report on the transition from being in the military to returning to being a civilian. Although the report draws attention to the plight of those leaving the armed forces and raises issues about housing, employment, and finances, it does not really tackle major issues associated with being in the military, such as culture and the lack of structure that the participants highlighted. Issues such as alcohol have been raised by Fossey, MacManus and Wessley. It is widely accepted that there is a big culture of alcohol consumption across all three branches of the military.

It is important that more veterans be afforded the opportunity to explore and express their experiences, to help us generate a more detailed and informed picture of the events that led them into criminality and engagement with the criminal justice system.

It is also important to acknowledge that there are limitations with this study. Just like any qualitative methodology, the study is reliant upon self-reporting from the participants, which includes any biases that they may harbour. The views expressed by the participants are subjective and therefore do not necessarily offer an objective (institution-wide) reflection of what happened. For instance, in the case of Participant 1, he discusses the nature of his friendship group as being good friends despite the fact that they had an influence on him starting to smoke and bunk off school. Nevertheless, each of the participants was open and explicit about their experiences in relation to what led them towards criminal behaviour. In some cases, they passed some of their activities off as 'boys being boys'. Furthermore, the sample size is modest to say the least, but this was necessitated by both methodological and situational constraints. There were others who initially volunteered to take part in the study but disappointingly decided not to take part later, which was within their rights to withdraw.

I, too, have had to face up to what may be my own biases and assumptions in order to prevent them from filtering into the way that I interpreted the information that I received from the participants.

The use of timelines and semi-structured interviews produced significant amounts of data. Surprisingly, the participants seem to express themselves more during the completion of their timelines than during the interview stage itself.

The main points derived from the data collected through the timelines and semi-structured interviews raised points about the culture. The participants confirmed the assumptions posed by other researchers and the literature that alcohol has played a very big part in the demise of at least two of the participants Simon and Lee. Simon said that his service in the army led to him becoming an alcoholic which then led to him taking drugs and by his own admission he said that was to enable him to drink more alcohol. Lee spoke about the overall culture of the army as being a negative experience. A culture that was built on the large consumption of alcohol, fighting and womanising. He expressed that this was also a problem when he left the army. He talks about returning to what he did whilst he was serving in the army, having no interaction with his family due to the fact, he was an alcoholic. He also turned to drugs to complement his drinking.

The two senior officers who gave their views and the leadership strategies that they employed with troops under their command both spoke about leading by example and promoting a culture that looked after all of the people in their charge. They talked about empathy and looking after not only the military careers of individuals but also their private lives. It is vitally important that those in leadership roles create the culture for their troops. It is also imperative that they provide structure for the men and women who serve under them. Admittedly, in the case of the Colonel, he oversaw a squadron of health care professionals who would lose much more than other soldiers in infantry regiments. Doctors would have lost their careers in and outside of the military, they would have faced hearings from their professional bodies such as

the General Medical Council (GMC), nurses from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), and other professionals would have lost their charters. They were engaged with their positions both as military and medical professionals.

It was also expressed that the MoD must take more responsibility for those who serve in the three branches of the UK armed forces. Troops should be given access to services such as those provided by the likes of Tom Harrison House and Healthier Heroes before they leave their specific branch. There should also be more emphasis on education and the transition process for servicemen and women to return to civilian life successfully. It was Lord Ashcroft who suggested that the Careers Transition packages should be offered to all service leavers; nevertheless, this needs to go much further than limiting the career prospects of certain individuals to joining the police and roles in security. There needs to be more encouragement for service leavers to enhance their prospects outside of the military.

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Appendix A

Participation Information

- 1. Recruitment letter**
- 2. Information sheet**
- 3. Consent form**

Participants, Veterans Hub, and Support Services

I am John Goulding a PhD student at Liverpool John Moores University in the School of Education. I am currently conducting a research study as part of my study entitled –

“Beyond incarceration: A phenomenological study into the educational experiences of veterans who have been in prison”.

Introduction: The study

I am a veteran of the UK Armed Forces having served in the RAF Police from 95-04, I served at RAF Halton, Brize Norton, and Shawbury in the UK. I also served in the Former Yugoslav Republic on Op Palatine, Falkland Islands and in support of Op Telic abroad. On overseas tours I worked in the Tri-Service environment alongside the Army and Royal Navy.

Individuals who are or have served in the UK armed forces are unique, as is the job that they are asked to do. The UK armed forces are asked to participate in humanitarian missions

around the world, peacekeeping in diverse theatres as well as protecting us from aggressors in whatever form that it may take, this could be in theatres in Iraq, Afghanistan or providing security in Britain and Northern Ireland. Personnel who have volunteered in the UK armed forces have possibly been subjected to violence by enemy forces, watched friends die in the most horrific ways whilst also helping millions by their mere presence. However, statistics show that a relatively high percentage of those that have left the armed forces are likely to encounter the criminal justice system as veterans form the biggest cohort of any professional group incarcerated in UK prisons.

The purpose of this study is to enable veterans to reflect upon their own educational as well as life experiences before enlistment, during their service and after they have left the armed forces. It is envisaged that this will give a better understanding as to how their engagement and experiences of education as well as other life events culminated in them being incarcerated. It is hoped that this study will result in a through life educational programme for veterans will be introduced in order to improve life outcomes for veterans and open up opportunities.

As with all studies that require an individual to reflect upon their life experiences, the process of engaging with memory and recollection may act as a trigger and could cause historical issues to re-merge. This may mean that participants require extra support to deal with these issues within their current setting.

Participation Criteria

For individuals to be considered for participation on the study they must:

- Be a willing participant.
- Supported by veterans' organisations in the Merseyside / Liverpool City Region area.
 - Served in the UK armed forces both regular and reserve (RAF, RN, Army)
- Male
- Be above the age of 21.
- Having served their first custodial sentence
- Having left custody between 6 months and up to 2 years.

I am looking for volunteers to take part in the study who match the set criteria and must stress that there is no pressure on individuals to take part! I would be very grateful if you could publicise this study via your networks.

Thank you for helping me with this study and I look forward to working with you.

Kind Regards



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET Veteran

Research Ethics Committee Reference Number: 23/EDN/001

Title of Study: "Beyond incarceration: A phenomenological study into the educational experiences of veterans who have been in prison".

If you prefer an audio recorded version / link to the contents of this Participation Information Sheet can be accessed by clicking into the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/18D1TpCdBWjOrwOiVjOV6ET3udlvU2e4I/view?usp=sharing>

You are being invited to take part in a research study. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. Please read this information, which will help you decide.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

There is a growing concern regarding the rising numbers of veterans being put in prison. As it stands veterans form the largest cohort of any profession in the criminal Justice system. The purpose of this study is to examine whether life experiences before, during, and after their enlistment and in particular their educational experiences are a contributing factor to them committing crime and subsequently being imprisoned after leaving the armed forces. The study aims to give a voice to the veterans who participate in the project and will be based on their experiences. The researcher John Goulding is a former member of the armed forces and is carrying out the study as part of his PhD.

2. Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited because you have identified as meeting the criteria for participation in the study set out below -

- Be a willing participant.
- Be supported by veterans' organisations in the Merseyside / Liverpool City Region area.
- Have served in the UK armed forces both regular and reserve (RAF, RN, Army) ○ Male
- Be above the age of 21.
- To have engaged in (and been subjected to an intervention) for pre-custodial behaviour/s; or
- To have served their first custodial sentence
- If experienced custody, to have served a sentence between 6 months and up to 2 years.

3. Do I have to take part?

No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether to take part. If you do not want to take part that is OK. We will ask you to sign a consent form and will give you a copy for you to keep. Your consent will also be audio recorded.

You can stop being part of the study at any time, without giving a reason, you may withdraw from the study by contacting me at LJMU on the email address stated below.

You must not take part if you have COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to attend an introductory meeting at the veteran's hub where I will explain the timeline process in more detail. If you decide that you wish to participate in the research, I will arrange an introductory meeting with you. You will then be asked to complete a timeline before attending a further session to discuss your timeline and the final session will be an interview. The timelines/interviews will take place *in a veteran's hub for your safety and comfort* and should take approximately 1 – 2 hours to complete per visit, with a maximum number of 3 visits. You will be offered regular breaks as

necessary. You can also ask to pause or stop the timeline/interview at any time. Please remember, you have the right to decline to answer any questions you do not want to.

5. Will I be photographed, or video/audio recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

I would like to audio record each of the interview sessions. You should be comfortable with the recording process, and you are free to stop the recording at any time whilst continuing to participate in the study.

The audio recordings of your activities made during this study will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission.

There will be no need to photograph or video you or the sessions.

6. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced in everyday life.

Questions included in this study require participants to reflect on their wellbeing. If you feel worried or in low mood, we would like to point out that there are several sources of advice or help which are free and readily available to you and which may provide useful. Specifically, these include: The veterans support hubs involved in this study.

If participation in this study has negative effects on you; please seek help and advice from support services such as the Op Courage team in your area, the Gateway for Veterans, The Veterans Hub that is supporting the study, your GP.

In addition to this, I have compiled a list of external organisations and charities that, if you wish (or feel the need to), you can also utilise and contact. (I can either provide you with a paper copy of these contacts, or you can [click here to access an online copy](#))

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no personal benefit to you from taking part in this study. However, it is hoped that there will be benefits to those in the future, such as a higher awareness of the need for an education for those whilst serving in the UK Armed Forces along with an enhanced programme for those that leave and those who have been caught up in the CJS.

8. Payments, reimbursements of expenses or any other benefit or incentive for taking part.

There will be no payment or any benefit or incentive for taking part in this study. Unfortunately, we cannot reimburse any expenses you may incur.

9. What will happen to information/data provided?

The information you provide as part of the study is the **study data**. Any study data from which you can be identified (e.g. from identifiers such as your name, date of birth, audio recording etc.), is known as **personal data**. Your participation in this study will not involve the collection/use of personal data by the investigator.

We will keep personal data safe and secure. People who do not need to know who you are will not be able to see your any personal identifiers or details. The personal data collected will include:

- A record of consent (which will include your name)
- Study data. We will use a code/pseudonym so that you cannot be directly identified from the data. Study data will include Audio recording[s] (which include your voice). Interview recordings will be deleted once the interview transcript has been verified as accurate and an evaluation has determined that it has no further research value.
- Study data / records of consent / contact details will be kept for 3 years after the study has finished.

We will not tell anyone that you have taken part in the focus group, although there is of course a possibility that another member of the group might recognise you. All members of the focus group will be asked to respect the confidentiality of their fellow participants.

We will write our reports in a way that no-one can work out that you took part in the study.

The investigator has a professional obligation to inform relevant agencies if they learn about in certain exceptional circumstances where you or others may be at significant risk of harm, the investigator may need to report this to an appropriate authority. This would usually be discussed with you first. Examples of those exceptional circumstances when confidential information may have to be disclosed are:

- The investigator believes you are at serious risk of harm, either from yourself or others
- The investigator suspects a child may be at risk of harm.
- You pose a serious risk of harm to or threaten or abuse others.
- Under a court order requiring the University to divulge information
- We are passed information relating to an act of terrorism.

10. Who is organising and who is funding/commissioning the study?

This study is organised by Liverpool John Moores University and funded by me.

11. Whom do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain? If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact *John Goulding* or *Dr Craig Hammond* (see email addresses at the end of the document) and we will do our best to answer your query. You should expect a reply within 10 working days. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at Liverpool John Moores University who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

Chair, Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee; Email: FullReviewUREC@ljmu.ac.uk; Tel: 0151 231 2121; Research Innovation Services, Liverpool John Moores University, Exchange Station, Liverpool L2 2QP

12. Data Protection

Liverpool John Moores University is the data controller with respect to your personal data. Information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from:

- <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/legal/privacy-and-cookies/external-stakeholders-privacypolicy/research-participants-privacy-notice>

13. Contact details.

Principal Investigator: John Goulding
LJMU postgraduate research student
LJMU Email address:
LJMU School/faculty: School of Education
LJMU Central telephone number: 0151 231 2121

Supervisor Name: Dr Craig Hammond
LJMU Email address



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM [*Veterans who have served custodial sentences*]

Study title: "Beyond incarceration: A phenomenological study into the educational experiences of veterans who have been in prison".

Research Ethics Committee Reference Number: 23/EDN/001

Principal Investigator: John Goulding

LJMU postgraduate research student

LJMU Email address: LJMU School/Faculty: School of Education

LJMU Central telephone number: 0151 231 2121

Supervisor Name: Dr Craig Hammond

LJMU Email address:

If you are happy to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

		<i>Please initial</i>
1.	I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated. 12/10/2022 have (version 2) for the above study, or it has been read to me. I had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand what taking part in the study involves	
3.	I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions I can withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without penalty or my legal rights being affected.	
4.	I have been advised about potential risks associated with taking part in this study and have taken these into consideration before consenting to participate	
5.	To the best of my knowledge, I do not meet any of the exclusion criteria outlined in the information sheet for this research. If this changes at a later date during study participation, I agree to notify the researchers immediately.	
6.	I give explicit consent for this study to process my special category personal data	
7.	I agree to joint copyright of the [specify the data] to [name of investigator].	NA
8.	I agree to my General Practitioner being informed of my participation in the study.	NA
9.	I give permission for the investigator to take possession of	NA
10.	I agree that the [investigator to provide details of the item] will not be returned to me	NA
11.	I give permission to the investigator to take a copy of my timeline and to use it to analyse and process the data	
12.	I understand that the investigator will be unable to guarantee control of access to authorised viewing of the [audio recordings/video recordings/photographs – INVESTIGATOR TO EDIT] taken of me during the study and I am happy to proceed.	NA
13.	I understand that the study involves taking audio recordings of me and I am happy to proceed.	

14.	I agree that [audio recordings/video recordings/ photographs – INVESTIGATOR TO EDIT] can be taken of me during the study. (Participants are free at any time to decline to be audio recorded whilst continuing to participate in the study)	YES	NO
15.	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.		
16.	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from Liverpool John Moores University for monitoring and audit purposes		
17.	I agree for my contact details to be stored for the purpose of contacting me about future studies and I understand that agreeing to be contacted does not oblige me to participate in any further studies	YES	NO
18.	I understand that personal data may be transferred to countries outside of the European Economic Area where there may not be the same level of protection of peoples' privacy as that demanded by law in the UK.	NA	
19.	I understand that personal data will be retained beyond the duration of the study		
20.	<i>IF APPLICABLE</i> I consent to my [insert sample type] sample(s) being stored securely at LJMU <i>OR</i> at [INVESTIGATOR TO INSERT DETAILS] until they have been analysed <i>OR</i> for the duration of this research [INVESTIGATOR TO CHANGE IF DIFFERENT] – and used for the research purposes outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.	NA	
21.	<i>IF APPLICABLE</i> I consent to my [insert sample type] sample(s) (or derivatives of) being stored at LJMU <i>OR</i> at [INVESTIGATOR TO INSERT DETAILS] indefinitely and used in further ethically approved research, outside the scope of the current project that take place in hospitals, universities, non-profit institutions or commercial laboratories worldwide	YES	NO
22.	<i>IF APPLICABLE</i> I give consent for my [insert sample type] sample(s) to be used for DNA analysis or other genetic testing as described in the Participant Information Sheet	NA	
23.	<i>IF APPLICABLE</i> I give consent for my [insert sample type] samples to be used for future DNA analysis or other genetic testing as part of a different ethically approved study.	NA	
24.	I understand that personal data will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified in reports or any further outputs		
25.	I understand that audio recordings taken of me may be used in the final report and any further outputs.		
26.	I understand that parts of our conversation will be used verbatim in future publications or presentations and I agree to be attributed to quotes and identifiable in reports or publications.		
27.	I understand that parts of our conversation will be used verbatim in future publications or presentations and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified in reports or any further outputs		
28.	I agree to be attributed to data and/or information in any reports or future outputs.		
29.	I understand that even though all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified, I may be indirectly identifiable when the study findings are disseminated.		

30.	I understand the potential risks of being identifiable in reports and any future outputs when the findings of the study are disseminated	
31.	I understand that there may be instances where information is revealed which means that the investigators will be obliged to break confidentiality, and this has been explained in more detail in the information sheet.	
32.	I agree to take part in this study	

Data Protection. Any personal information we collect and use to conduct this study will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet and the [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#).

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing

☐

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Name of Investigator

Date

Signature

Name of Person taking consent

Date

Signature

(if different from investigator)

Note: Unless there is good reason not to do so, and if this reason has been explained in the ethics application that received a favourable ethical opinion, the investigator AND the participant should each retain a copy of the signed participant consent form

Appendix B

Data collection

Timeline grid

Project participant timeline research: Aspects of education and life course stages (overview)

Life course stage	Education	Formal Education (FE) (Schools & Training Institutions)		Non-Formal Education (NFE) (Community, groups, other organisations)		Informal Education (IE) (Family, friends, peers – impact on identity)		
1. <u>Early life / Pre-Service</u> (Including Schooling & qualifications)		 Missed or lost 'FE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'FE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'NFE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'NFE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'IE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'IE' benefits	<i>Ideally, how would you have liked this to have been different?</i>
2. <u>During Armed Forces Service</u>		 Missed or lost 'FE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'FE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'NFE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'NFE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'IE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'IE' benefits	<i>Ideally, how would you have liked this to have been different?</i>
3. <u>Post-Service</u> (Including incarceration & after)		 Missed or lost 'FE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'FE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'NFE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'NFE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'IE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'IE' benefits	<i>Ideally, how would you like your educational future / life chances to be different?</i>

Journey towards Service-Life & incarceration (Education / identity / life-chances)

Life course stage 1 – timeline & key influential events Life course stage 2 – timeline &

	<u>Formal Education (FE)</u> (Schools & Training Institutions)		<u>Non-Formal Education (NFE)</u> (Community, groups, other organisations)		<u>Informal Education (IE)</u> (Family, friends, peers – impact on identity)		
<u>Post-Service</u> (Including incarceration & after)	 Missed or lost 'FE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'FE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'NFE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'NFE' benefits	 Missed or lost 'IE' opportunities	 Advantages or perceived 'IE' benefits	<i>Ideally, how would you like your educational future / life-chances to be different?</i>
Plot timeline & key events							
							<i>been different?</i>
Post-service, incarceration & release – Formal, Non-formal & Informal Education (identity & possibilities)							
Early / pre-service life: journey towards service life – Formal, Non-formal & Informal Education (shaping identity & possibilities)							

Appendix C

Data grids Freedom of Information request

Table 1 & 2

Table 1 – Intake of recruits to the army by region MoD (2023)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Region								
Northeast	550 (7%)	540	430	390	410 (6.3%)	540	550	420
Northwest	1060 (13.5%)	1100	840	770	660 (10%)	880	930	800
Yorkshire and the Humber	870 (11%)	870	750	630	620 (9.5%)	840	890	640
East Midlands	600 (7.6%)	620	630	530	520 (9.2%)	780	780	540
West Midlands	620 (8%)	680	650	560	530 (8%)	820	900	620
East of England	530 (6.7%)	570	690	520	480 (7.3%)	690	770	500
London	250 (3.1%)	300	340	280	290 (4.4%)	400	420	310
Southeast	800 (10.2%)	1010	1000	840	870 (13.3%)	1340	1360	990
Southwest	700	770	770	650	710	950	1120	730
Channel Islands	10 (0.1%)		10	10	0	10	10	10
Isle of Man	10 (0.1%)	10			0		10	10
Scotland	630 (8%)	610	560	450	410 (6.3%)	520	540	410

Wales	460 (6%)	450	410	390	340 (5.2%)	520	520	370
Northern Ireland	180 (2.3%)	160	160	140	120 (1.8%)	130	160	110
Other	570 (7.2%)	400	390	520	600 (9.1%)	1270	500	800
Total	7850	8100	7620	6680	6560	9700	9450	7270

The figures for this table have been collected from a Freedom of Information request to the Ministry of Defence and reproduced in the table above.

Table 2 – HM Government (2019) Figures reproduced from The English Indices of Deprivation

		IMD 2019		IMD 2015		
	Authority	Count of LSOAS in 1 st decile	% of LSOAS in 10% most deprived nationally	Count of LSOAS in 1 st Decile	% of LSOAS in 10% most deprived nationally	Percentage point change from 2015
1.	Middlesbrough	42	48.8%	42	48.8%	0.0
2.	Liverpool	145	48.7%	134	45.0%	3,7
3.	Knowsley	46	46.9%	45	45.9%	1.0
4.	Kingston upon Hull	75	45.2%	75	45.2%	0.0
5.	Manchester	122	43.3%	115	40.8%	2.5
6.	Blackpool	39	41.5%	36	38.3%	3.2
7.	Birmingham	264	41.3%	253	39.6%	1.7
8.	Burnley	23	38.3%	20	33.3%	5.0

9.	Blackburn with Darwen	33	36.3%	28	30.8%	5.5
10.	Hartlepool	21	36.2%	19	32.8%	3.4
11.	Bradford	104	33.5%	101	32.6%	1.0
12.	Stoke on Trent	51	32.1%	48	30.2%	1.9
13.	Halton	25	31.6%	21	26.6%	5.1
14.	Pendle	18	31.6%	16	28.1%	3.5
15.	Nottingham	56	30.8%	61	33.5%	-2.7
16.	Oldham	43	30.5%	32	22.7%	7.8
17.	North East Lincolnshire	32	30.2%	31	29.2%	0.9
18.	Hastings	16	30.2%	16	30.2%	0.0
19.	Salford	45	30.0%	43	28.7%	1.3
20.	Rochdale	40	29.9%	38	28.4%	1.5

Table 3 – The most deprived local authority districts according to the IMD 2015 and 2019. Authorities are ranked on the proportion of neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% nationally.

HM Government (2019) The English Indices of Deprivation

2015	2019
1, Middlesbrough (Northeast)	Middlesbrough
2. Knowsley (Northwest)	Liverpool
3. Kingston upon Hull	Knowsley
4. Liverpool (Northwest)	Kingston upon Hull
5. Manchester (Northwest)	Manchester

6. Birmingham	Blackpool
7. Blackpool (Northwest)	Birmingham
8. Nottingham	Burnley
9. Burnley (Northwest)	Blackburn with Darwen
10. Hartlepool (Northeast)	Hartlepool
11. Bradford (West Yorkshire	Bradford
12. Blackburn with Darwen (Northwest)	Stoke on Trent
13. Stoke on Trent - Hastings (Southeast)	Halton
14,	Pendle
15. Northeast Lincolnshire	Nottingham
16. Salford (Northwest)	Oldham
17. Rochdale (Northwest)	Northeast Lincolnshire
18. Pendle (Northwest)	Hastings
19. Halton (Northwest)	Salford
20. Great Yarmouth	Rochdale
21. Wolverhampton	Hyndburn
22. Hyndburn (Northwest)	Walsall
23. Leicester	Newcastle
24. Tower Hamlets (London)	Wirral
25. St Helens (Northwest)	Great Yarmouth
26. Sheffield	South Tyneside
27. Oldham (Northwest)	Barrow in Furness
28. Sandwell	St Helens
29. Barrow in Furness (Northwest)	Redcar and Cleveland
30. Newcastle (Northeast)	Sheffield
31. Leeds	Bolton
32. Barnsley	Doncaster

In 2015 14 of the 32 most deprived local authorities were from the Northwest whilst in 2019 this had risen by 2 to 16. As can be seen from the figures from the MoD above the largest

regions for recruit intakes are from the Northwest and Southeast where there is only one local authority on this list across the years 2015 to 2022. This suggests that it is true that the military and, in this case, specifically the army target areas of high deprivation with their recruitment policy.

If the research is taken into consideration that links areas of high deprivation with high rates of crime and offending, then the current figures appear to buck any trends. The figures reveal that the biggest areas for recruitment into the British army are the Northwest and Southeast.

The index of multi deprivation (IMD) show that there were 14 local authorities in the Northwest of England and just 1 from the Southeast in the top 10% of areas of deprivation. In 2019 the figure in the Northwest rose to 16 and there were none from the Southeast, this is not saying that there is no deprivation in the Southeast

Crime overall in the Northwest in 2023 had a rate of 77 crimes per 1000 people with the most common offences being violence and sexual offences. This was measured to happen to 32 out of 1000 daytime population

The overall crime rate in the Northwest in 2023 was 77 crimes per 1,000 people, and the most common crimes were violence and sexual offences, which happened to roughly every 32 out of 1,000 daytime population.

The overall rates in the Southeast over the same reporting period was slightly higher than the Northwest with a total of 78 crimes per 1000 people. Again, the most common crimes committed were those of a violent nature and sexual offences that occurred to approximately 37 out of 1000-day time population again slightly higher than in the Northwest.

However, both the Northwest and Southeast crime rates are lower than the national average. The rate for crime across the UK as a whole is a huge 87.28 per 1,000 people across the reporting period of 2023–2024. Whilst the UK's crime rate decreased by 1.6% from 2022. Among England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, England, has the highest crime rate which is at

89.18 crimes per 1,000 people. Therefore, the two regions are much lower than the English National average. Crime statistics for Northwest and Southeast obtained from Crimerate.co.uk (accessed 30 June 2024).

However, in 2019 the Southeast was the largest area for recruitment into the army with the Northwest coming next. Over the period 2015 to 2022 from the Northwest there were 7040 individuals recruited into the army whilst there were 8210 recruited from the Southeast into the army. Table 2 – The 20 local authority districts with the highest proportion of neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods nationally on the IMD

2019 and change since the IMD2015.³⁵

Appendix D

Ethics approval letter

Dear John

Goulding, John - PGR “Beyond incarceration: A phenomenological study into the educational experiences of veterans who have been in prison” (Craig Hammond)

UREC opinion: Favourable ethical opinion

UREC reference: 23/EDN/001

Research Governance Assessment: Approved – the study may commence.

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) has considered the above application. On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above study on the basis described in the application form, protocol, supporting documentation and any clarifications received, subject to the conditions specified below.

Conditions of the favourable opinion Prior

to the start of the study.

³⁵ This is the difference between the index of multiple deprivation between 2015 and 2019. These surveys are carried out every 3 to 4 years.

- Covid-19. Studies that involve in-person activity – The extent of any in-person contact and the measures taken by the study team to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 must be explained to participants in advance in order to inform decisions about participating – update the [participant information sheet](#) as required After ethical review.
- You must ensure the information included in the [participant facing documents](#) are always current and informed by ongoing risk assessments and any changes to current practices.
- Where any substantive amendments are proposed to the protocol or study procedures further ethical opinion must be sought (<https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ris/research-ethics-andgovernance/research-ethics/university-research-ethics-committee-urec/amendments>)

-
- Any adverse reactions/events which take place during the course of the project are reported to the Committee immediately by emailing FullReviewUREC@ljmu.ac.uk
 - Any unforeseen ethical issues arising during the course of the project will be reported to the Committee immediately emailing FullReviewUREC@ljmu.ac.uk

Please note that favourable ethics opinion is given for a period of five years. An application for extension of the ethical opinion must be submitted if the project continues after this date.

Research Governance Approval.

This email also constitutes LJMU Research Governance Approval of the above referenced study on the basis described in the ethics application form, protocol, supporting documentation and any clarifications received, subject to the conditions specified below. Conditions of Approval

- Compliance with [LJMU Health and Safety Codes of practice and risk assessment policy and procedures](#) and [ljmu-code-of-practice.pdf](#)
- Ensure the study is covered by UMAL [Insurance | Liverpool John Moores University \(ljmu.ac.uk\)](#)
- Covid-19. Compliance with LJMU updates detailed in the [moving forward together](#) webpages
- Where relevant, appropriate gatekeeper / management permission is obtained at the study site concerned.
- The LJMU logo is used for all documentation relating to participant recruitment and participation e.g. poster, information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires.
- The study consent forms, study data/information, all documents related to the study etc. will be accessible on request to a student's supervisory team and/or to responsible members of Liverpool John Moores University for monitoring, auditing and data authenticity purposes.

Yours sincerely



Mandy Williams, Research Support Officer

(Research Ethics and Governance)

Research and Innovation Services Exchange Station, Tithebarn

Street, L2 2QP e: <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ris/research-ethics-and-governance>