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Albertson, K, Banks, K and Murray, ET (2017) Military Veteran Offenders: Making sense of developments in the debate to inform service delivery. Prison Service Journal, 234. pp. 23-30. ISSN 0300-3558

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Military Veteran-offenders: Making sense of developments in the debate to inform service delivery

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Published version

ALBERTSON, Katherine, BANKS, James and MURRAY, Emma (2017). Military Veteran-offenders: Making sense of developments in the debate to inform service delivery. *Prison Service Journal*, 234, 23-30.

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Military veteran-offenders:

Making sense of developments in the debate to inform service delivery

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In a 2008 report by the National Association for Probation Officers³ it was estimated that in excess of 20,000 ex-service personnel were serving a sentence in either prison or the community in England and Wales. Since this report, we have witnessed a steady growth in research, literature and knowledge exchange seeking to make sense of veterans' offending and the veteran-offender.⁴ Here, we provide a brief overview of the key development of this debate since the recognition of the 'problem' of ex-military personnel in prison nearly ten years ago. This discussion problematizes the narrow focus on veterans' engagement with criminal justice and suggests that the quality of transition from military to civilian life is in fact contingent on a more complex interplay of social, cultural and economic participation-linked factors. We propose that by considering the complexities of transition, veterans' offending is more appropriately positioned amongst wider structural challenges faced on return to civilian society. This approach informs the limited recent empirical work in this area, which has been slow to filter into mainstream criminal justice practice. It is our contention that veterans' contact with the criminal justice system needs to be understood within the broader explanatory frameworks of diversity and social inclusion. We make specific recommendations, based on new developments in the veteran-offender debate, to inform service delivery to this cohort in the criminal justice system.

Despite the lack of definitive figures for the veteran population in prison, there remains a great deal of political, practitioner and academic interest in this area, alongside growing concerns regarding the unprecedented increase in public health uptake and criminal justice service contact by ex-service personnel. It is estimated that poor transition from military service into civilian life cost the UK tax payer £98 million in 2015 alone.⁵ Of the 757,805 people who served as Regulars in the British Armed Forces between 1991 and 2014 it has been estimated that at least 66,090 may need to access support services; this is equivalent to 1 in 11 who may need a helping hand either now or in the future.⁶

A review of the key messages across the last ten years of study of veterans and veteran-offenders is pertinent given the recent introduction of Veteran Wings at the UK's largest new-build prison, HMP Berwin Russ, which opened in Wrexham earlier this year. Addressing critical questions regarding what we know and where we are heading with regard to the delivery of services to the veteran community is therefore timely, particularly with regard to the focus on how this decade of work can most effectively inform criminal justice service delivery.

NAPO to now: identification, diagnosis, response

In response to the National Association of Probations Officers (NAPO) report identifying the large number of veterans mired in the criminal justice system, the social justice charity NACRO published 'A Guide to Working with Veterans in Custody'.⁷ Highlighting the apparent lack of awareness amongst criminal justice practitioners of the impact of military experiences on

1. The evaluation of Addaction's veteran specific Right Turn project (2015–2017). The aim of the Forces in Mind Trust is to promote the successful transition of Armed Forces personnel, and their families, into civilian life. For more details, see the web page: <http://www.fim-trust.org/>.
2. The British Academy/ Leverhulme small grant was awarded in 2015, to conduct narrative life history interviews with criminal justice engaged military veterans focussing on identity transitions.
3. National Association of Prison Officers (2008) Ex-Armed Forces Personnel and the Criminal Justice System.
4. Murray, E. (2013) Post-army trouble: veterans in the criminal justice system, *Criminal Justice Matters*, 94(1), pp.20–21.
5. Forces in Mind Trust (2013) The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life, p 7.
6. Diehle, J., and Greenberg, N. (2015) Counting the Cost report: Help for Hero's and KCMHR, [on-line]: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/kcmhr/publications/assetfiles/2015/Diehle2015.pdf> (Accessed 30/01/2017).
7. James, S., and Woods, N. (2010) A Guide to Working with Veterans in Custody, NACRO; London. Available: <http://www.nacro.org.uk/data/files/working-with-veterans-810.pdf> (Accessed 30/01/2017).

veterans, this guidance document sought to assist professionals in their engagement with this cohort. The report emphasises the different language codes and culturally nuanced ways in which ex-military personnel reason due to their service training. The guidance contains advice regarding how practitioners can use this culturally-specific information to engage more effectively with this often hard-to-engage population. Elsewhere, Treadwell's 'Counterblast' article in the Howard journal of Criminal Justice presents an informed practitioner-based view of veterans who have come into contact with probation.⁸ As an ex-probation officer, Treadwell relates his encounters with veterans, emphasising how many who leave the ordered life of the forces struggle to transition into the civilian world. Significantly, Treadwell recognises that coming into contact with the criminal justice system represents just one of a myriad of harms that may be experienced by individuals who leave the Armed Forces.

The Howard League's 2011 'Report of the inquiry into former Armed Service personnel in prison' asserted that ex-service personnel represented the largest occupational subset of the male prisoner population in the UK.⁹ Bringing the issue of veteran offending into the public sphere, such behaviour was depicted as a continuation of some individuals' pre-enlistment engagement with crime. This perspective has come under sustained criticism for depicting current veterans' problems as the product of individual deficits.¹⁰ In response, McGarry and Walklate propose an alternative framework for making sense of ex-service personnel's post war engagement in crime.¹¹ By imaging the 'soldier as victim', the authors assert that the state is accountable for exposing military personnel to combat, which can have a detrimental impact on their return to civilian life.

The Government and policy response to this situation manifest in 2014 with Lord Ashcroft's Veterans Transition Review,¹² the Phillips Review¹³ and two associated reports^{14, 15} which make a range of recommendations relating to the collection of cohort data and the co-ordination of services and diversion schemes. The quantitative data elements of this work identified that veterans in the criminal justice system have little in the way of distinct needs when compared to their non-ex-forces peers.¹⁶ An apparent recognition of the potential harms of military service is however reflected in the UK Government's ratification of the UK Armed Forces Covenant in 2011 in which responsibilities to current and former Armed Forces personnel and their families have been formalised.¹⁷ The Covenant states that no current or former member of the British Armed Forces should face disadvantage in public or commercial services and in some cases they should receive special consideration. Yet the Covenant remains a statement of principle rather than a legally binding duty of care for the Armed Forces community. And whilst Covenant principles are cited as underpinning policy developments in the criminal justice system, practitioners are only directed to use military service as a relevant identification category when 'the offending behaviour in question can be shown to be directly caused by service in the Armed Forces'.^{18, 19} This situation highlights a tension between criminal justice practice and the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Disappointingly the Covenant-based ethos is yet to be reflected in strategic support for the many good practice examples of working creatively with ex-forces in custody. The HM Inspectorate of Prisons' report in 2014 identified both a lack of consistency in approach across the prison estate and that successful activities were being implemented through the hard work and determination

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8. Treadwell, J. (2010) COUNTERBLAST: More than Casualties of War?: Ex military Personnel in the Criminal Justice System. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 49(1), pp.73–77.
 9. The Howard League (2011) *Report of the inquiry into former Armed Service personnel in prison*. London: The Howard League for Penal Reform.
 10. e.g. Early Service Leavers; Female veterans; those with and without combat experience; Retirees; BAME veterans; The Bereaved; the war injured; older veterans; younger veterans; those employed and unemployed on leaving service; veterans with no contact with support services or public services.
 11. McGarry, R., and Walklate, S. (2011) The soldier as victim: Peering through the looking glass, *British Journal of Criminology*, 51 (6), 900–917.
 12. Ashcroft Review (2013) *The Veterans Transition Review*.
 13. Phillips, S. QC, MP (2014) *Former Members of the Armed Forces and the Criminal Justice System: A Review on behalf of the Secretary of State for Justice*.
 14. Kelly, J. (2014) *The Needs of Ex-service Personnel in the Criminal Justice System: Evidence from two surveys*, Ministry of Justice Analytical Summary: evidence on the needs and experiences of ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system.
 15. Lyne, C., and Packham, D. (2001) *The Needs of Ex-service Personnel in the Criminal Justice System: A Rapid Evidence Assessment*, Ministry of Justice Analysis Series.
 16. *ibid.*
 17. Ministry of Defence (2011) *The UK Armed Forces Covenant*: available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49469/the_armed_forces_covenant.pdf.
 18. Phillips, S. QC, MP (2014) *Former Members of the Armed Forces and the Criminal Justice System: A Review on behalf of the Secretary of State for Justice*, p 6.
 19. The full quote is: 'any suggestion that former services personnel who have offended should receive different treatment within the criminal justice system from their civilian counterparts runs the risk of undermining public confidence in the Covenant unless the offending behaviour in question can be shown to have been directly caused by service in the Armed Forces (which is rarely the case)', *ibid.* p 6.

of committed staff, rather than through formalised support or profiled hours.²⁰ A publication in the *Lancet*, from the King's Centre for Military Health Research team demonstrated that ex-service personnel are in fact less likely than their civilian counterparts to have contact with the criminal justice system.²¹ However, those who do offend are significantly more likely to engage in violent and sexual offending. This study received significant national media coverage and we can only speculate on the social stigma implications. The 2016 Probation Institute Report²² highlights the continued patchy understanding of the needs of veterans on probation, particularly post the Transforming Rehabilitation²³ (TR) reforms. The TR reforms promised tailored provision for veteran-offenders,²⁴ yet these innovations have thus far, according to the Probation report remained elusive. Collectively, this body of work illustrates the continued lack of recent empirical, theoretical and practice-based work filtering through to mainstream criminal justice practice.

... almost a fifth of ex-service personnel have reported finding themselves disadvantaged when accessing public and commercial services ...

supports our proposition that military veterans in transition face a complex array of disadvantages. For example, over and above coming into contact with the criminal justice sector, working age veterans in the UK are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their civilian contemporaries.^{25,26} Moreover, almost a fifth of ex-service personnel have reported finding themselves disadvantaged when accessing public and commercial services, for example having trouble obtaining a mobile phone contract, whilst a quarter highlighted that they had been refused a mortgage, loan or credit card in the past five years.²⁷ Those leaving military service are also identified as being at increased risk of social isolation, as social and civil engagement profiles fall dramatically.^{28, 29, 30} This body of work points towards the need to understand veterans' offending within a broader explanatory framework which incorporates diversity and social inclusion agendas.

A more nuanced understanding of the potential origins of veteran offending and their support needs more broadly is, however, evolving. Overriding concerns with the governance of veterans³¹ are shifting to the complexity of veterans' engagement in civilian society as a whole, not just within the criminal justice sector. For example, an appreciation of the multitude of factors that can prevent a 'good transition' from military to civilian life is evident in work commissioned through agencies such as the Forces in Mind Trust. Their Transition Mapping study acknowledges how subjective, structural and participatory factors all impact on veterans' entry into civilian life:

Understanding veterans' transition experiences

It is our contention that veterans' contact with the criminal justice system needs to be understood within the broader context of their transition to civilian life. In this section we move away from explaining veteran offending through the individual deficit model to highlight research producing a more comprehensive picture of ex-forces experiences of re-entry into civilian society. While much less reported in the national media this evidence base

20. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prison (2014) *People in prison: Ex-service personnel*, London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.
21. MacManus, D., Dean, K., Jones, M., Rona, R.J., Greenberg, N., Hull, L., Fahy, T., Wessely, S. and Fear, N.T. (2013) Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: a data linkage cohort study. *The Lancet*, 381(9870), pp.907–917.
22. Ford, M., Mills, H., and Grimshaw, R., with Allison, C. (2016) *Profile of Provision for armed forces veterans under probation supervision*, The Probation Institute, available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/Profile%20of%20provision%20for%20armed%20forces%20vet%20erans%20under%20probation%20supervision.pdf>
23. Ministry of Justice (2013) *Transforming Rehabilitation: A strategy for reform 2010–2015*. Available at: <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/transforming-rehabilitation/results/transforming-rehabilitation-response.pdf>.
24. Lyne, C., & Packham, D. (2014). *The needs of ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system: a rapid evidence assessment*. London: Ministry of Justice.
25. Royal British Legion (2014) *A UK Household Survey of the ex-Service community*, available at: <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/2275/2014householdsurveyreport.pdf>.
26. Royal British Legion (2016) *Deployment to Employment: Exploring the veteran employment gap*: Available [on-line]: <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/the-veteran-employment-gap/>.
27. Ashcroft Review (2013) *The Veterans Transition Review*.
28. Hatch, S.L., Harvey, S.B., Dandeker, C., Burdett, H., Greenberg, N., Fear, N.T. and Wessely, S. (2013) Life in and after the Armed Forces: social networks and mental health in the UK military. *Sociology of health & illness*, 35(7), pp.1045–1064.
29. Iverson, A., Nikolaou, V., Greenburg, N., Unwin, C., Hull, L., Hotopf, M., Dandeker, C., Ross, J., and Wessely, S. (2005) 'What Happens to British Veterans when they leave the Armed Forces?', *European Journal of Public Health*, 15 (2): 175–184.
30. Hipes, C., Lucas, J.W. and Kleykamp, M. (2014) Status-and Stigma-related Consequences of Military Service and PTSD Evidence from a Laboratory Experiment, *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 41 no. 3 477–495.
31. Murray, E. (2016) *The 'Veteran-offender': A Governmental project in England and Wales*, Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and War.

*A good transition is one that enables ex-Service personnel to be sufficiently resilient to adapt successfully to civilian life, both now and in the future. This resilience includes financial, psychological, and emotional resilience, and encompasses the ex-Service person and their immediate families.*³²

The National Health Service (NHS) has responded to this increasingly evidenced reality of veterans as a patient cohort experiencing significant cultural barriers into help seeking services by defining veterans as a Priority Health care group. Further, the NHS Constitution has been amended to ensure that Veterans are 'able to access services with health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture'.³³ Despite the availability of these nuanced messages and practice responses from other public sectors and nearly ten years work since the NAPO briefing paper, criminal justice agencies maintain they have no access to 'evidence about effective ways of addressing veterans needs in total' and specifically not since 'the changes required by the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda'.³⁴ Until alternative discourses around the broader experiences of veterans in transition are transferred into the criminal justice policy and commissioning landscape, they will not influence national criminal justice practice standards.

The first empirically-based research of veterans' contact with post-transforming rehabilitation commissioned services has recently been completed from a criminal justice perspective.^{35, 36, 37} This two year study of Addaction's³⁸ Right Turn veteran-specific recovery project³⁹ highlights the benefits of employing an holistic peer group based service delivery model. This

research identifies veterans' engagement with substance misuse and criminal activity among a range of issues faced post service. These issues include veterans: lack of transferable education and employment options; and social isolation; as well as day-to-day problems such as: managing finances and debt; access to secure accommodation; negotiating the complexities of the benefits system; and accessing appropriately specialist health services. The Right Turn project has been successful both in terms of enhancing veterans' recruitment into and continued engagement with support services. Further positive outcomes of project engagement are identified as veterans' engaging in voluntary and paid work and social engagement in wider and more diverse social networks. The impact this delivery model has had on veterans' lives more broadly has also been evidenced through sustained recovery from addictions, and a dramatic reduction in criminal justice engagement amongst the cohort. This study highlights how a strengths-based, culturally competent and holistic approach to veteran status can facilitate a significant reduction in social isolation and supports the development of a positive community participation-based identity, captured in the concept of 'military veteran citizenship'.⁴⁰

It is clear the initial efforts to identify the numbers of the veterans in the criminal justice system have been furthered by practitioner work highlighting the lack of awareness of the military experience within criminal justice operatives.^{41, 42} Veterans' offending has been shown to be only one of a myriad of challenges faced on leaving service. This has run parallel to discourse around military service as acting as a 'deep freeze' on prior offending behaviour.⁴³ State responsibilities have been

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32. Futures Company and Forces in Mind Trust (2013) The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life, p 13. [on line]: <http://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/20130810-TMS-Report.pdf> Accessed 08/11/16.
 33. National Health Service Constitution (2015) Handbook to the Constitution- Principles that guide the NHS, p 17. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supplements-to-the-nhs-constitution-for-england>.
 34. Ford, M., Mills, H., and Grimshaw, R., with Allison, C. (2016) Profile of Provision for Armed Forces Veterans under Probation supervision, The Probation Institute Report.
 35. Albertson, K., Best, D., and Irving, J. (2015) 'A Social Capital approach to assisting veterans through recovery and desistance transitions in civilian life', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 54 (4): 384–396.
 36. Albertson, K., and Best, D., with Irving, J., Murphy, T., Buckingham, S., Morton, G., Stevenson, J., Crowley, M., Mama-Rudd, A., and Chaggar, A. (2016) Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service: 5 Site Evaluation Pilot: Interim Report (March 2016), Sheffield Hallam University: Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice.
 37. Albertson, K., Best, D., Pinkney, A., Murphy, T., Irving, J., and Stevenson, J. (2017) 'It's not just about recovery': The Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service Evaluation, Final report (June 2017), Sheffield Hallam University: Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice.
 38. Addaction are one of the UK's largest specialist community drug and alcohol treatment charities, for more details see the web page: <https://www.addaction.org.uk/>.
 39. For more details about the Right Turn project, see the web page: <https://www.addaction.org.uk/help-and-support/adult-drug-and-alcohol-services/right-turn>.
 40. Albertson, K., Best, D., Pinkney, A., Murphy, T., Irving, J., and Stevenson, J. (2017) 'It's not just about recovery': The Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service Evaluation, Final report (June 2017), Sheffield Hallam University: Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, p 68.
 41. James, S., and Woods, N. (2010) A Guide to Working with Veterans in Custody, NACRO; London.
 42. Treadwell, J. (2010) COUNTERBLAST: More than Casualties of War?: Ex military Personnel in the Criminal Justice System. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 49(1), pp.73–77.
 43. The Howard League (2011) Report of the inquiry into former Armed Service personnel in prison. London: The Howard League for Penal Reform.

raised within the debate⁴⁴ and recognition of the potential harms of military service is reflected in the Armed Forces Covenant.⁴⁵ Tensions around the purpose of identifying veteran status in the context of offending behaviour have been identified, along with the publication of more nuanced, veteran offending profile data.⁴⁶ Practitioners in the criminal justice sector are willing to embrace the distinctions in veterans experience to ensure their practice is informed^{47, 48, 49} indicating the prospective benefits of the veteran-offender debate being moved forward in a new direction.

New Directions—a diversity and social inclusion agenda

Over the last decade it has been identified that those with a military service history experience significant challenges on transition into civilian society. There has been a continuation of a dichotomous debate regarding the causes of veterans' offending behaviour, whilst policy and practice has been hampered by a lack of empirical data. Ultimately, the picture is much more complex than this. Despite some recent positive developments, the issue of veterans in the criminal justice system lacks the application of a broader framework of diversity and social inclusion agendas. The complexity of the lived experiences of veterans requires a more

holistic consideration of veterans' pre-enlistment situation, their experience of military service and consideration of the opportunities for social, community and civic participation upon leaving. In order to account for these participatory issues the research focus requires a more holistic turn, informed by the experiences of the diverse veteran population themselves. Of particular interest is establishing the extent to which members of the Armed Forces Community feature among those facing multiple social disadvantages. The potential of viewing the experiences of UK military veterans as an increasingly marginalised group within the wider social and political context ultimately means shifting into an explanatory framework incorporating issues of diversity, social inclusion and participation.

Empirical research, theory and policy is only beginning to engage with the impacts of pre-enlistment life, military service and post service experiences on veterans. What we do know is that veterans have a distinct offending⁵⁰ and wellbeing profile,⁵¹ that they face significant barriers to accessing support services due to a lack of sensitivity about military culture amongst key professionals⁵² and also experience significant levels of social exclusion.^{53, 54, 55, 56, 57} These obvious injustices result in some veterans being excluded from civilian therapeutic and support contexts because they are misunderstood or judged.^{58, 59, 60} Many veterans understandably prefer to see practitioners who have an understanding of and

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44. Walklate, S., and McGarry, R. (2015) Competing for the trace: The legacies of war's violence, in Walklate, S and McGarry, R (Eds) *Criminology and War: Transgressing the Borders*, London: Routledge.
 45. Ministry of Defence (2011) *The UK Armed Forces Covenant*.
 46. MacManus, D., Dean, K., Jones, M., Rona, R.J., Greenberg, N., Hull, L., Fahy, T., Wessely, S. and Fear, N.T. (2013) Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: a data linkage cohort study. *The Lancet*, 381(9870), pp.907–917.
 47. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prison (2014) *People in prison: Ex-service personnel*, London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.
 48. MacManus, D., and Wood, N. (2017) *The Ex-Armed Forces offender and the UK criminal justice system*, in Hacker-Hughes, J (Ed) *Military Veteran Psychological Health and Social Care: Contemporary Issues*, Routledge: London and New York.
 49. Albertson, K., Best, D., Pinkney, A., Murphy, T., Irving, J., and Stevenson, J. (2017) 'It's not just about recovery': The Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service Evaluation, Final report (June 2017), Sheffield Hallam University: Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice.
 50. MacManus, D., Dean, K., Jones, M., Rona, R.J., Greenberg, N., Hull, L., Fahy, T., Wessely, S. and Fear, N.T. (2013) Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: a data linkage cohort study. *The Lancet*, 381(9870), pp.907–917.
 51. Bashford, J., Collins, C., Hasan, S., and Professor Lord Patel (2015) *Call to Mind: A framework for action*, Community Innovations Enterprise on behalf of the Forces in Mind Trust and NHS England.
 52. *ibid.*
 53. Iverson, A., Nikolaou, V., Greenburg, N., Unwin, C., Hull, L., Hotopf, M., Dandeker, C., Ross, J., and Wessely, S. (2005) 'What Happens to British Veterans when they leave the Armed Forces?', *European Journal of Public Health*, 15 (2): 175–184.
 54. Hatch, S.L., Harvey, S.B., Dandeker, C., Burdett, H., Greenberg, N., Fear, N.T. and Wessely, S. (2013) Life in and after the Armed Forces: social networks and mental health in the UK military. *Sociology of health & illness*, 35(7), pp.1045–1064.
 55. Hipes, C., Lucas, J.W. and Kleykamp, M., (2014) Status-and Stigma-related Consequences of Military Service and PTSD Evidence from a Laboratory Experiment, *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 41 no. 3 477–495.
 56. Keeling, M., Wessely, S., Dandeker, C., Jones, N., and Fear, N. T. (2015) 'Relationship difficulties among UK military personnel: Impact of sociodemographic, military, and deployment-related factors,' *Marriage & Family Review*, 51(3), 275–303.
 57. MacManus, D., and Wood, N. (2017) *The Ex-Armed Forces offender and the UK criminal justice system*, in Hacker-Hughes, J (Ed) *Military Veteran Psychological Health and Social Care: Contemporary Issues*, Routledge: London and New York.
 58. Albertson, K., Best, D., Pinkney, A., Murphy, T., Irving, J., and Stevenson, J. (2017) 'It's not just about recovery': The Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service Evaluation, Final report (June 2017), Sheffield Hallam University: Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice.
 59. Stack, C. R. (2013) 'How is psychological therapy experienced by ex-UK armed Forces members? An exploration through personal narrative of cross-cultural encounters.' (Doctoral dissertation, Middlesex University/ Metanoia Institute).
 60. Wainwright, V., McDonnell, S., Lennox, C., Shaw, J., and Senior, J. (2016) 'Treatment Barriers and Support for Male Ex-Armed Forces Personnel in Prison Professional and Service User Perspectives.' *Qualitative Health Research*.

sensitivity towards military life and culture.⁶¹ Ultimately, this cohort, not wholly heroes, victims or villains, have a right to a balanced and sensitive approach to the development of services suited to identifying, assessing and managing their needs.⁶² Understanding the social and cultural impact of military experience on journeys post military service is beginning to generate explanatory theoretical frameworks to examine the notion of 'transition' as a cultural legacy of military life.⁶³ From this position, the significance of the impact of the change in 'rules' from military environments compared to civilian ones is exposed, as service personnel must navigate a complex cultural transition when moving between military and civilian cultures. Understanding these issues from the perspective of a wide variety of differently experienced veterans⁶⁴ and their families and communities must form the bedrock of future research agendas and practitioner-based initiatives.

The Government and wider society have both a stake and a role in ensuring veterans are able to acclimatise from military to civilian spheres. This means providing opportunities or safe spaces in which veterans can make the shift from a sense of self from soldier to citizen,⁶⁵ or as moving from living in 'civilian life as a serving soldier' to embracing a fuller, positive and more future facing 'military veteran citizenship'.⁶⁶ It would therefore appear necessary to explore the possibility that poor transition outcomes may be related to complications in securing any sense of post-service identity. Interestingly, veterans who have no contact with publicly funded support services are not seen as challenging. For example, the

persistence of the military identity has been identified un-problematically in leavers from the US Air force,⁶⁷ former Army, Navy and RAF veterans living in the city of Plymouth⁶⁸ and those retiring directly from the forces into civilian life.⁶⁹ If we do not include those who appear to have made a successful transition (defined as not coming to the attention of public services), we may miss identifying pathways and key pointers which facilitate more effective transition for their peers.

Acknowledging identification with a military service history is an important identity marker amongst this cohort. In order to facilitate the shift to a post-military identity requires us to approach these distinctions not as a deficit, but as a culturally relevant marker of a range of constructive resources.

Practice informed by this type of culturally competent approach has been shown to be more effective in reducing the barriers to veterans asking for and engaging in support services, be they health, social care or criminal justice.⁷⁰

The Government and wider society have both a stake and a role in ensuring veterans are able to acclimatise from military to civilian spheres.

Conclusions and implications

The move from military service into civilian society is a significant life transition, which for some veterans can lead to contact with the criminal justice system, alongside a variety of other social ills. However, military transition remains a process about which we know little about. In turn, empirically and theoretically informed policy approaches and practice remain sparse. As a consequence, how we choose to respond to veterans is likely to continue to be based on unsubstantiated

61. Ben-Zeev, D., Corrigan, P.W., Britt, T.W., and Langford, L. (2012). Stigma of mental illness and service use in the military, *Journal of Mental Health*, 21, 264–273.
62. McCartney, H. (2011). Hero, victim or villain? The public image of the British soldier and its implications for defence policy. *Defence & Security Analysis*, 27, 43–54.
63. Cooper, L., Caddick, N., Godier, L., Cooper, A. and Fossey, M. (2016) Transition From the Military Into Civilian Life: An Exploration of Cultural Competence', *Armed Forces & Society*.
64. e.g. Early Service Leavers; Female veterans; those with and without combat experience; Retirees; BAME veterans; The Bereaved; the war injured; older veterans; younger veterans; those employed and unemployed on leaving service; veterans with no contact with support services or public services.
65. Stack, C. R. (2013) 'How is psychological therapy experienced by ex-UK armed Forces members? An exploration through personal narrative of cross-cultural encounters.' (Doctoral dissertation, Middlesex University/ Metanoia Institute).
66. Albertson, K., Best, D., Pinkney, A., Murphy, T., Irving, J., and Stevenson, J. (2017) 'It's not just about recovery': The Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service Evaluation, Final report (June 2017), Sheffield Hallam University: Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, p 68.
67. Yanos, R.C. (2004) Perceptions of Adjustment to Civilian Life among Recently Retired Air Force Officers, University of Maryland.
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assumptions⁷¹ which impact on access to social justice for ex-service personnel. Responding to veteran status as a proxy for high risk of offending or as a treatment indicator for a homogenous group (wholly heroes, victims or villains) are unhelpful for practice. If these assumptions are left unchallenged we risk public and commercial services stigmatising veterans who transgress as somehow less deserving. We need policy makers, researchers, theoretical framework developers, Armed Forces charities/third sector agencies and the wider Armed Forces community to interact with each other in partnership in order to facilitate the development of an holistic understanding of the transitional experiences of military veterans.

The inclusion of veterans' experiences of transition in the veteran-offender debate can help us understand how best to 'mobilize this capital into accepted civilian norms' which are proving essential to a 'good' transition enhancing the 'possibility of successful employment and personal outcomes'.⁷² Further, we must acknowledge that the cultural and structural experiences in the military may influence the ways in which the military service legacy is expressed for many years beyond leaving service life.^{73, 74} Veterans' voices are key to the development of these new directions and discourse, and we need to ensure that the wider Armed Forces community themselves are utilised to facilitate these successful transitions. Ultimately, there are distinctive forms of institutionalized cultural capital that are embodied and valued within the military. These differ from the cultural capital required to integrate in civilian society. In order to formulate the best transitional experience, we need to facilitate opportunities for the veteran community to develop a 'sense of identity and purpose [that] isn't rooted in the past' but rather 'based on their present civilian circumstances and their plans for the future'.⁷⁵ In order to achieve this, the veteran community are best served by being both considered and included via a diversity and social inclusion framework. We make four recommendations, reflecting the new developments in the debate on veteran-offenders to inform service delivery within the criminal justice setting.

Since the NAPO report, over ten years ago, we are still awaiting definitive figures for the veteran population in the UK criminal justice system.

First, veterans in the criminal justice sector are recognised as a distinct and culturally diverse population, thereby ensuring responsibility for the ex-forces population becomes a part of the existing custodial Equality and Diversity Officer mandate. Second, mandatory military service awareness training is delivered across the public services sector, including all staff in the criminal justice context. Third, a political and policy level commitment to the introduction of a national veteran pathway is secured. This could take the form of a strengths-based, cross sector approach, meaning that both veterans in custody and custodial staff benefit from accessing more informed support intervention packages. This will incorporate through the gate services to address health and social care needs, addictions issues and social inclusion discrepancies. Accessing Council's Armed Forces

Covenant resources means that veterans in custody will be connected with the wider local Armed Forces community (including families), ensuring a holistic pathway which values relationships, enhances social capital gains and provides opportunities for community participation. This way, the experiences, voices and talents of the currently untapped community resource that the Armed Forces Community represent can be utilised to aid those veterans caught up in the criminal justice system. Finally, a commitment to a theoretically informed evidence-

base that advises commissioners and influences practice for veterans—across health and social care, addictions and the criminal justice context—thus ensuring good practice is shared and sustained throughout this national military veterans' pathway.

Since the NAPO report, over ten years ago, we are still awaiting definitive figures for the veteran population in the UK criminal justice system. The UK Armed Forces Covenant principle that no current or former member of the British Armed Forces should face disadvantage is yet to be reflected in any strategic support for ex-forces provision in the criminal justice sector. The purpose of identifying veteran status in the context of offending behaviour has been highlighted as problematic. Likewise, the

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continued focus of the dichotomous debate on explaining the causes of veterans' offending has proved unhelpful. Policy and practice reform has been hampered by a lack of empirical data. Therefore, should we not move the veteran-offender debate forward, we risk responding to offending veterans based on these unsubstantiated assumptions which impact negatively on ex-service personnel.

This paper asserts that the incorporation of these new developments in the veteran-offender debate could provide a service delivery model responding to the status of veteran as a protected characteristic,

warranting the delivery of culturally competent training. Further, we recommend this be complemented by a cross sector pledge to both a national veteran pathway and evidence-base collection strategy—working across health and social care, addictions and the criminal justice context. We assert that by making sense of new developments in the evidence base around veterans transitioning into civilian society, we can broaden the veteran-offender debate, thus ensuring service delivery to this cohort focusses on facilitating social justice for ex-service personnel.



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