The Unresolved Battles:
A Qualitative Study Exploring the Lived
Experiences of UK Military Veterans
Incarcerated in Scotland

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and that it is the result of my own independent work.

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Abstract

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Keywords: veterans, desistance, incarceration, offending, trauma, identity, transitions

Background: Military veterans represent a sizeable occupational group incarcerated in UK prisons. Research investigating why is predominately dominated by discourse around employment and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Theorising the collective experiences from an interdisciplinary and biographical approach, this PhD study furthers the debate on how pathways from military service to prison might be interrupted in the future.

Methods: Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen veterans incarcerated in Scotland, UK. Data were analysed using an analytically pluralistic approach utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Thematic Analysis.

Findings: Themes of adverse childhood experiences, institutionalisation, transitions, and 'failed' identities helped to frame an understanding of the lived experiences of these veterans. Accounts of being unprepared for the transition both in and out of military service resulted in the participants challenging life histories becoming more so as a result of military service. This was especially true for those who joined prior to their eighteenth birthday. For most, the path to criminal offending was short; with weak support structures and newly formed failed military identities negatively influencing their transition back into civilian life.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that the Ministry of Defence should systematically look for, and address instances of pre-enlistment trauma prior to enlistment, especially for those who enlist prior to their eighteen birthday. This is suggested not a means to deter enlistment but to better prepare individuals with complex histories to the challenges that lay ahead in military service. As society is ill equipped to support these veterans in resolving the internal battles they contend with after service, better support should be provided when sudden exits are necessary and unprepared for.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This PhD thesis explores the lived experiences of fifteen UK military veterans incarcerated in Scottish prisons through a biographical lens. Through their world view, the thesis explores the challenges and experiences that contributed to their offending across the life course[1]. Previous research has advocated for future works to explore the relationships that exist between difficult life transitions, military service and involvement with the criminal justice system (Bachman *et al.*, 2000; Crabb and Segal, 2015). However, while research that examines the veteran population often exists in disciplinary silos (i.e. psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics), the literature that explores their needs and experiences tends not to sit singularly within each discipline. This study makes an original contribution to research in this area, by exploring the life histories of incarcerated veterans through an interdisciplinary approach, in order to better understand how characteristics and experiences which often straddle disciplinary boundaries (i.e. trauma, unemployment, alcohol and substance use) have impacted their pathways to offending and imprisonment (Crabb and Segal, 2015).

With an estimated 3% of the UK prison population identifying as a veteran, the deficit of knowledge around the needs of the veteran population with experiences of the criminal justice system impedes 'best practice' for those seeking to understand the ways in which desistance can be supported and recidivism can be prevented (Ministry of Justice, 2021). With a higher representation of incarcerated veterans in Scotland at 3.2% of the prison population, there is a particular need to understand how the life events of these individuals could have contributed to a higher prevalence of offending in this part of the UK (The Scottish Government, 2020). Since the early twentieth century, researchers have been exploring the relationship between military service and offending behaviours as a means to lessen the impact of military offending on society (See[2]: Wagley, 1944; Hakeem, 1946; Holland and Luszki, 1958). Challenges such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), adverse childhood experiences (ACE), socio-economical deficits and poor social support systems in the veteran population have been cited as contributors to offending (See: Brewer and Herron, 2022; Meadows *et al.*,

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[1] For a participant overview, please see Appendix One. Further, participant profiles are available in Chapter Three.
[2] Where the reader may gain further insight, recommendations for literature are noted following the word 'See' in the reference brackets.

2022; Inoue *et al.*, 2022). More recently, conversations about 'moral injury', poor psychosocial support and unseen pathways to offending for the veteran community have spurred a stronger financial commitment to understanding the needs of veterans and their families in order to facilitate a wider societal shift in how the veteran community is supported by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) (See: Paden *et al.*, 2021; Frankfurt and Frazier, 2016; Grimell and Nilsson, 2020; Williamson *et al.*, 2019; Murphy and Sharp, 2011; Kopacz *et al.*, 2016).

This research contributes to this goal through exploring how experiences across the life course prior to, during, and following military service can contribute to poor identity formation, poor help seeking behaviours and ultimately offending. Throughout this research, identities, adverse childhood experiences, barriers to help seeking and challenged masculinities have been explored as experiences that impacted the participants' transitions in and out of the military, and their offending pathways. Ultimately, this study aimed to collect their unique insights and to give voice to an underrepresented and marginalised population in both research and society. This was achieved by posing the question often asked of incarcerated veterans: *What went wrong?*

This chapter will foreground the thesis and existing literature, by first presenting an introduction to the UK military as it currently operates. The chapter will then provide an overview of some of the characteristics and challenges that veterans contend with during the military to civilian transition, linking these to the transition from military service to incarceration. The chapter will conclude with additional insights about the veteran research landscape, the position of the researcher and an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Military Recruitment and Population

Historically, the military has been responsible for protecting UK shores for over a thousand years through a variety of roles, including combat and humanitarian support (Howard *et al.*, 1988). Presently, the UK operates an all-volunteer force, with full time serving members and reservists. Individuals can serve their country in the British Army, Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force, with speciality forces existing amongst the primary branches. In 2021, there were 17,073 recruits who joined from 2020-2021 and 196,000 personnel in post in the same year (House of Commons, 2022a; Ministry of Defence,

2022). This section will provide an overview of the recruitment approach undertaken by the UK military and its implications for the military population.

1.1.1 Military recruitment narratives

Since World War II, the military has promoted service in the armed forces as a service provided to the country through sacrifice, which coincides with benefits such as access to education and employment opportunities and experiencing travel (Mathers, 2018) (See Figure One and Two)[3]. These narratives, often given as a rationale to enlist, are often echoed throughout generations as a means to encourage enlistment in UK military service and relive past stories of battle and glory in the 21st century (Bachman *et al.*, 2000).

Figure 1: UK Army Recruitment Flyer c. 1920's

Figure 2 : UK Army Recruitment Flyer c. 1940's

However, many of the roles provided by the military in times of conflict and war have shifted away from being managers of violence and now focus on advancing technologies, peace keeping missions and the provision of support in times of natural and manmade disasters (Wilen and Strombom, 2021). Changes to the reality of military life have required the military to alter its' overall mission statement to the public, with recruitment strategies shifting away from the self-sacrifice narrative, towards a self-

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[3] The images referenced in Figures One through Six were retrieved from the Imperial War Museum archives and from the direct Ministry of Defence recruitment pages. Full citations noted in the Bibliography.

serving narrative focused on education and employment opportunities as a means to increase recruitment (See Figure Three and Four).

Figure 3: UK Army Recruitment Flyer c. 2015

Figure 4: UK RAF Recruitment Flyer c.2016

As illustrated in recent recruitment strategies launched over the last fifteen years, the military is having to shift further by placing the focus on diversity campaigns, self-identity and personal characteristics through the use of modern colloquialisms as a means to entice new recruits (See Figure Five and Six).

Figure 5: UK Army Recruitment Flyer c.2020

Figure 6: UK Army Recruitment Flyer c.2019

While the shift in military recruitment transitions from social obligation to personal identity, there is increasing awareness of the military's inability to match the deeply engrained expectations held by new recruits, which has influenced current recruitment numbers. Importantly, in 2021, the proposed military strategy did not specifically prioritise combat experience, travel or overseas missions over the next few years (See: The Integrated Review 2021, UK Cabinet Office Report). Further, in 2021, less than 8,000 out of 196,000 personnel were based overseas (House of Commons, 2022a). Highlighting how historical views of military service including combat experiences and travelling abroad are changing. In addition to these challenges, long standing austere measures and an onslaught of redundancies enforced by the Strategic Defence and Security Review, have meant that the military actively seeks to widen its recruitment pool with new recruits with potentially smaller benefit contracts and pension obligations (HM Government, 2018; Hines *et al.*, 2015). However, the ways in which the military has changed over the last fifty years are often understated and often it is society and

those within in that are slow to catch up, leaving many feeling unsure about military service.

1.1.2 Diversity in the UK military

As the military currently engages in ongoing redundancies and changes to its organisational structure, individual branches continue to strive to increase their overall recruitment pool as a means to ensure a strong fighting force for the nation. With this need in mind, the Armed Forces as a whole has sought to become a more inclusive employer through shifting the historical narrative of who and what constitutes a soldier. However, the military continues to struggle in its' representation of diversity across all three branches in terms of gender and ethnic and cultural identities (See Figure Seven and Eight). In 2022, 8.9% of military personnel were reported as ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities). Within the Regular Forces, 3% were classed as Officer with 11.5% representing 'Other Ranks'. Within the Future Reserves 2020, 4.6% were classed as Officers with 6.5% representing 'Other Ranks' (Ministry of Defence, 2023).
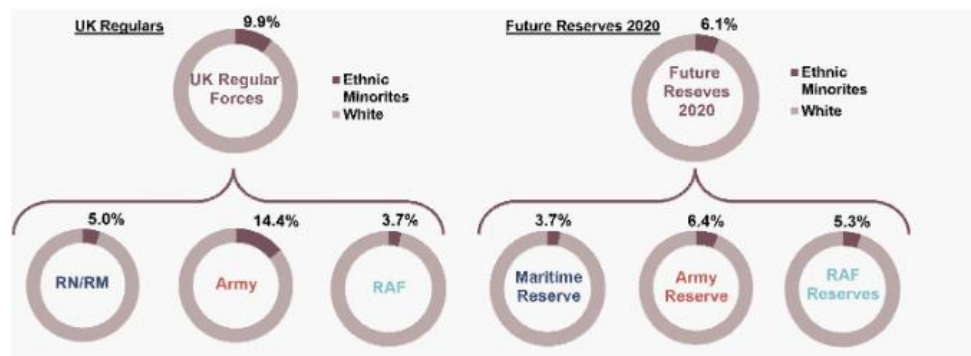
Figure 7: 2022 UK Armed Forces Diversity Representation. Source: MoD, 2022

Similarly, there is a low representation amongst female personnel both in the Regular and Future Reserves 2020 (Ministry of Defence, 2023). In 2022, just 11.4% of the UK Regular Forces and 15.7% of the Future Reserves 2020 identified as women (Ministry of Defence, 2023)
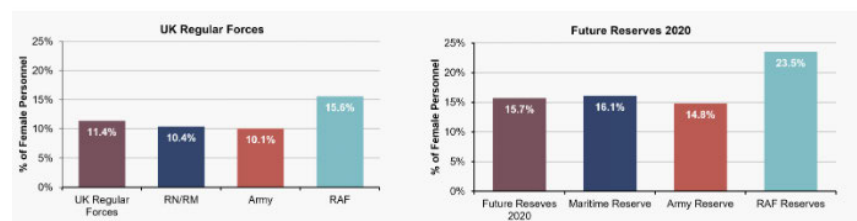
Figure 8: 2022 UK Armed Forces Diversity Representation. Source: MoD, 2022

While the overall recruitment of more diverse populations is reported to be increasing, the low representation of diversity suggests that the recruitment narratives and incentives outlined above fail to appeal to these demographics (Ministry of Defence, 2023). As such, the majority of the Regular Forces continue to identify as male and identify as part of the White ethnic group (House of Commons, 2022a). Consequently, much of what we know about the veteran population primarily focuses on this population of personnel.

1.1.3 Recruitment of young people

However, while the research may focus on Caucasian males, there remains a gap in what is understood about the experiences of young people (i.e. those under the age of twenty five), who have engaged in military service. This gap is noteworthy considering how many young people report to have experience of the armed forces in the 21st Century. In 2022, over two thousand under 18's were reported to be serving in the Armed Forces, with approximately 25.6% of the UK Regular Forces being under the age of twenty five, with a high prevalence joining the British Army (House of Commons, 2022a) (See Figure Nine).
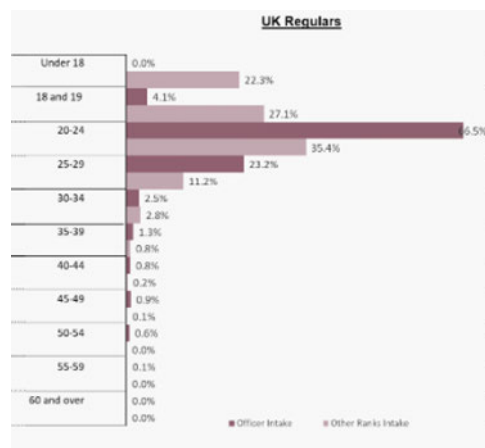
Figure 9: 2022 UK Military Regulars Intake by age
Source: MoD, 2022

Whilst it is no longer possible to enlist prior to the age of sixteen, this was possible amongst veterans who are currently over the age of thirty. Consistently, a large proportion of new recruits enlist between ages of seventeen and twenty, although officer entrants tend to be older (House of Commons, 2022a) .The literature speaks to the implications for young people joining military service as the age of recruitment can impact the trajectory of their military career as those joining under the age of eighteen

are less likely to join as officers or with educational qualifications (See Figure Ten and Eleven) (Nindl *et al.*, 2018; Child Rights International Network, 2019).

***Figure 10: 2022 UK Military Officers by age
Source: MoD, 2022***
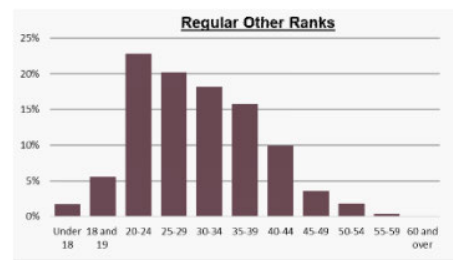
Figure 11: 2022 UK Military 'Other Ranks' by age. Source: MoD, 2022

Relevant to this study is the phenomena of the *boy soldier.* This term, coined prior to World War II, is used to refer to individuals who join the military under the age of eighteen, as was the case for many participants in this study (Clarke and Plant, 2022). For those who join the military at such an age, entering into military culture can come as a shock. Further, characteristics such as age have been found to be an influential factor in considering whether an individual has the ability to adjust to new situations and maintain resilience when transitioning into military life (Nindl *et al.*, 2018). As such, particular challenges pervade this population in relation to their understanding of the requirements of military service. For example, often additional contract time was allocated to military personnel service records due to their age at recruitment.

Historically, enlistment policy regarding those joining under the age of eighteen noted that the two years of service prior to their eighteenth birthday did not formally count towards their service contracts (UK Parliament, 2011).This time was often referred to as 'Service to the Queen' by individuals who were affected by these contractual obligations. As such, while many participants in this study understood their contracts to be four years, their contracts actually required up to six years of service before a discharge period was permitted.

Further, age was also noted as a determinant factor in how individuals understand their employment and enlistment rights prior to joining military service (Nindl *et al.*, 2018). Noted amongst this participant population was common misunderstandings of how and when it was possible to discharge from military service for those who joined prior to the age of eighteen. Currently, for recruits that join after the age of eighteen and have served more than six months, there is often no right to

discharge until the age of twenty-two, which equates to a four-year service contract, barring extenuating circumstances. For individuals who join prior to the age of eighteen, there is a 'cooling' period which allows new recruits to cancel their contracts after a specified amount of time, which varies by branch of service (UK Parliament, 2011). Following this period, both parents and guardians are unable to remove the recruits from their contracts without signed permission from their senior commanders in many situations. Ultimately, for young people with limited life experiences, poor literacy skills or a lack of experience with formal contracts, the realisations that military life may be longer and more constricting than anticipated can be influential to their life course.

1.1.4 Educational Representation in the UK military

Historically, the advancement of educational and employment opportunities has been cited as a motivator for enlisting in the UK military (Bachman *et al.*, 2000). However, the research into military recruitment has highlighted a large proportion of military recruits as lacking in formal qualifications with many reporting negligible literacy capabilities, limiting the overall potential educational opportunities available to those recruits (UK Parliament, 2014; Child Rights International Network, 2019).

As the data around military literacy rates is sporadic in nature, the lack of evidence available around the educational provision and attainment of individual branches highlights how little is known about the educational challenges of military recruits and how these barriers effect recruitment strategies (UK Parliament, 2005). However, in 2020, a Freedom of Information (FOI) request made on behalf of a member of the public reported that the ''Royal Navy does not access recruits' reading ages'', and ''The Royal Air Force had no recruits with a reading age below 11''. Highlighting how the British Army remains the only branch to make recruit qualifications publicly available. Represented below is the table made available by the FOI, providing an overview of the available statistics of the literacy profile of new British Army recruits in 2019 (UK Parliament, 2020) (See Figure Twelve).

Reading age	Number of recruits
Five – seven	20
Seven - nine	220
Nine – eleven	760

Figure 12: Literacy levels of the 2019 Army Recruits. Source: MoD 2020 FOI

Historically, the Army will accept recruits with no GCSE's, whereas the other branches have minimum entry requirements that often are inflexible (UK Parliament, 2005). Therefore, a full understanding of the educational landscape of the military is difficult to ascertain. Further, educational limitations are not contained to the Army, as all three branches allow enlistment with few academic qualifications, especially if the employment interests of the recruit do not require a minimum qualification prior to enlistment. While there is a noticeable gap in the provision of data in this area, in 2004, the UK government released a parliamentary report highlighting the limited literacy skills of the Army in particular (See: Figure Thirteen).

Basic skills levels comparison table

National Curriculum	Basic Skills Levels
GCSE Level A-C	Level 2
GCSE Level D-G	Level 1
11 year old	Entry Level 3
7 year old	Entry Level 2
5 year old	Entry Level 1

Random sample of 4,265 recruits at ATRS in 2003-04 showing basic skills levels

	Entry Level 1	Entry Level 2	Entry Level 3	Level 1
Literacy	0.57%	8.03%	32.59%	58.80%
Numeracy	0.49%	7.53%	39.00%	52.96%

Figure 13: 2004 Army Basic Skills Survey Source UK Parliament 2004

For many new recruits, the research has found that the ability to enlist is seen as a way to address their lack of educational opportunities, low socio-economic status and move away from challenging home environments from a young age (Buckman *et al.*, 2013; Child Rights International Network, 2019). This arguably leads to an increasing population of vulnerable young people being drawn into military service. Within the context of this research, educational attainment gaps, provision, and limitations were noted to be particularly relevant to those who served in the British Army. As such, the Army appears to be more likely to recruit less advantaged individuals, including the

recruitment of officers with lower levels of higher education compared to the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force (UK Parliament, 2014; Asoni and Sanandaji, 2014).

1.2   The Growing Veteran Population

While it is relevant to this study to consider routes into the military and the composition of the military personnel population, it is also necessary to consider those who leave. As such, the exploration of veteran experiences is of paramount importance as the number of veterans entering into civilian life in the UK will be significantly increasing by 2030 (MoD, 2023). This section will provide a brief overview of the UK veteran population and the more commonly cited needs and experiences of the veteran population as a means to highlight subjects that may be relevant to the participant population[4].

1.2.1   The Veteran Population

In 2022, almost two million veterans were reported as residing in the UK, with an estimated 230,000 residing in Scotland (House of Commons, 2022a). With 5% of all household residents over the age of sixteen identifying as a veteran in the UK, it is essential for these individuals to transition from military to civilian life with relative ease (Ministry of Defence, 2019). Importantly in the context of this research, 1% of the total veteran population report residing in Scotland, which impacts several types of veteran support systems such as mental health and housing (Ministry of Defence, 2019). Further, with 13,846 personnel leaving the armed forces in 2021 and a further 33,000 anticipated to leave by 2028, there is an increase concern around the difficulties veterans face when re-entering civilian life due to limited resources and a constrained veteran support landscape (See: Figure Fourteen) (House of Commons, 2022a, MoD, 2023).

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[4] Within the context of this thesis, it is not possible to consider and explore the literature that relates to the entire veteran population as individuals within this subgroup are individually unique due to multifaceted factors such as pre- enlistment conditions, variations in branches, and service conditions.

Regulars Outflow by Age
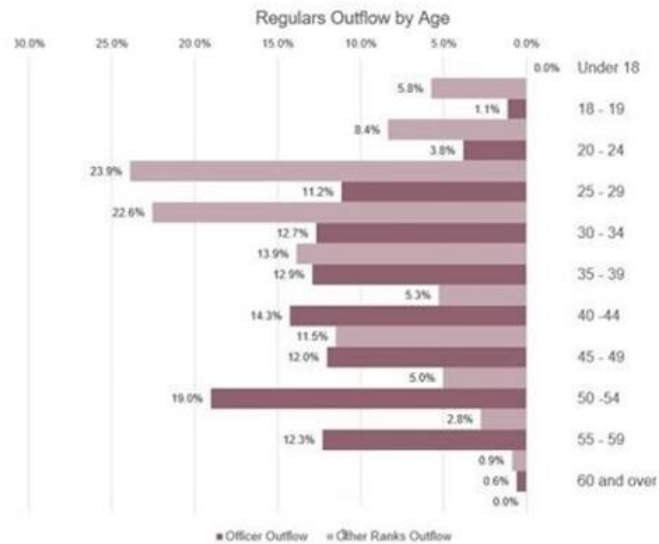
Figure 14: 2021 MoD statistics on personnel outflow

1.2.2 Transitioning back to Civvy Street

Important to the context of this research is the military to civilian transition. A transition that affects several thousand armed forces personnel each year. However, often this transition is treated and seen as a linear event, that occurs only once, when armed forces personnel officially sign out of military service. However, research has found that transitions are often not linear events, but events and processes that occur in tandem internally and often unconsciously (Malti *et al.*, 2015; Van Gennep, 1909). It is within the military to civilian transition that many individuals face the realisation that civilian life will be nothing like life in the military (MacManus and Wessely, 2013; Albertson, Irving and Best, 2015; Banks and Albertson, 2018). This realisation does not happen all at once but often is experienced in waves, with many veterans struggling with the reality of their new lives.

As such, many will be unprepared for the challenges they face during this transitional period. Practically, new veterans may experience a loss of resources such as their home, income and valued 'in service' relationships. Further, financial instability, deployment trauma, relationship difficulties, addiction and mental health problems have all been noted to further complicate this process of transitioning back into civilian life (Siebold, 2001; Buckman *et al.*, 2013). These difficulties are often further compounded by the loss of the military identity, which makes the military to civilian transition that much more difficult (Siebold, 2001). However, the loss of military identity does not

require one to have served in the military for a considerable amount of time to be considered impactful.

While many join the military with the aims of completing their contracts or retiring with a lifelong service history, many military personnel continue to leave military service unexpectedly and without preparation due to military redundancy programmes and premature discharge (Ministry of Defence, 2020). For those who are deemed 'early service leavers', discharge based on medical reasons, poor mental health, adjustment difficulties, and a lack of educational attainment can severely impact the transition back into civilian life. Further, the type of support available to early service leavers can be influenced by the reason for discharge (Ministry of Defence, 2020). For example, an individual may be less likely to get the full range of support on offer should they be discharged due to drug or alcohol misuse versus an individual who was hurt during a training exercise. Where individuals are leaving with shorter service histories, the transition out of military service can be swift and relentless, as many who join at a young age, against the will of their social groups and as a result of difficult home lives, some may have difficulty returning to their pre-enlistment lives and face transitioning into civilian life unsupported (Williamson *et al.*, 2019).

These circumstances can in turn influence how an individual views their time in military service. For individuals with positive views of their military service, time of service has been considered a positive contributor to successful re-integration with regard to employment and community re-integration. While a distinction has not been made between the time of service and branch needed to achieve such an outcome, employment and community engagement are considered to be highly influential in the pursuit of a 'successful' transition into civilian life (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011). For some veterans, an abrupt departure from the military leading to feelings of unmet expectations can lead to difficult transitions (Buckman *et al*., 2013). As such, a growing body of UK based research has explored the experiences of veterans in the UK, often with a focus on transitions to better understand what individuals need to re-integrate back into the community in which they left.

1.3   The veteran Research Landscape in the UK

Throughout the UK, there are a variety of settings where veteran research is being conducted as a means to better understand the lived experiences of military personnel, their place in society and their experience of transitions. While it would be

impossible to incorporate all of the literature relevant to this subject area within the constraints of a thesis, there are a number of notable institutes and organisations that have produced works that have guided this research. Within Kings College London, the King's Centre for Military Health Research has published over four hundred and eighty pieces of research that focuses on the lives of military personnel and veterans. Recent publications include research that focuses on the associations between PTSD, alcohol use and quality of life and the development and assessment of mental health tool kits for military veterans, both of which have informed this research study (See: Leightley *et al.*, 2022; Parkes *et al.*, 2022).

Contributing additional research on the subject of military lives, Liverpool John Moore University holds the Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation, and Social Exclusion. Research around the criminality of war, the veteran to offender transition and exploring the veteran transition through art has been a focus in recent years. Work which provides important insight into the position of the veteran in society. Within this thesis, where the subject of offending behaviours and transitions are explored, the centre's research has provided a strong foundation for exploration (See: Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2020; Albertson, Banks and Murray, 2017; Albertson, Taylor and Murray, 2019; Moorhead, 2020). The research produced with the centre has identified how the transitional experience can be influenced by a lack of social support systems, poor mental health and periods of alcohol misuse and drug addiction for the veteran population through the production and dissemination of social science, health and policy related research. Further, the centre's research explores how views of offending are often influenced by an individual's socio-economical background which highlights how vulnerable some veterans may be to poor transitions out of the military and into incarceration given the recruitment background of the military (See: Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2020; Albertson, Banks and Murray, 2017; Albertson, Taylor and Murray, 2019; Moorhead, 2020).

Additional works that have guided this study were produced within the Anglia Ruskin University as the university holds the Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research. Several important pieces of research around research methodologies, barriers to help seeking for the veteran population and veteran identity were explored as a means to understand the lived experiences of veterans (See: Clarke *et al.*, 2015; Cooper *et al.*, 2018; Fossey, 2010). As such, insights into pluralistic

methodologies was derived from several of the researchers within the institute, thus contributing to the development of this research study.

Within Sheffield Hallam University, several works around veteran mental health and addiction have contributed a great deal about what is known about the recovery journey for military personnel. Looking at the military to civilian transition through a social capital approach, there is a growing body of research that is being produced that aims to explore and understand substance misuse and criminality amongst the military population. In the context of this study, research around what is known about the relationship between the misuse of drugs and alcohol during military service and offending behaviour was utilised at some length due to the participant findings (See: Albertson, Irving and Best, 2015; Albertson, Banks and Murray, 2017; Banks and Albertson, 2018).

Further research that has informed this study was produced in collaboration with Liverpool John Moore's University and the Probation Institute, focusing on the journey to harmful behaviours by military personnel (See: Murray *et al.*, 2022). Within the context of this thesis, works such as these have provided a strong foundation for what is understood about the journey from being a 'veteran' to an 'offender'. In addition to this research, works produced by the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, within Queens University, Belfast has highlighted the impact that negative transitions can have on the veteran pathway towards offending. This research included one of the largest cohorts of military families to date, which is not simply unique in its existence but imperative to the field of military research (See: Brewer and Herron, 2022). In addition to this research, the University of Liverpool has conducted a range of veteran related research within the Military Repatriation Research cluster, which focuses on a range of military and veteran challenges, including research on the Horizon 2020 programme and criminality amongst the veteran population which informed this study with relation to criminality amongst the veteran population (See: Walklate and McGarry, 2011; McGarry, 2017). Throughout this thesis, research from each of these institutes has been highlighted due to the prevalence of masculinity, transitions and barriers to help seeking that is explored in this thesis.

However, a noted gap in the existent literature is the lack of research relating to veterans who engage in offending behaviours and the experiences of their families. Several institutes have emerged which are dedicated to lessening this gap in order to

better understand how military service influences families and the wider communities in which veterans live. Research that does focus on the military family explores the relationship between deployment, relationship breakdowns, childhood trauma and a high prevalence of domestic violence amongst the veteran community (See: The Centre for Social Justice; Anglia Ruskin University: Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research; Forces in Mind: The UK Veterans Family Study; North Umbria University: The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research; Veterans Gateway; Westminster Centre for Research in Veterans). With a particular gap in the literature around domestic violence amongst the veteran population, it remains unclear as to whether there is a direct correlation between military service and domestic violence, which is important in the context of this thesis. However, the research that does exist has provided further insight into how influential families are to the military to civilian transition (Williston, Taft, and Van Haasteren, 2015; Laub and Sampson, 1993; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1982).

In additional to academic research, further knowledge has come from outside of formal academic institutions, from organisations such as the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, the Officers Association, the Veterans Employment Transition support, the Royal British Legion (RBL) and the Armed Forces charity: the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA). Organisations such as these have an historical reputation for supporting veterans in the community through research and the development of best practice, some for over one hundred years (HM Government, 2018). In addition to this, outside of the provision of research, the Armed Forces Covenant has provided a range of support to veterans, their families and the wider community. As well as the provision of support, the Armed Forces Covenant provides a range of support to local businesses and organisations through hiring and training veterans with a range of incentives to encourage participation (HM Government, 2018). In addition to this, the Armed Forces Covenant also facilitates the Armed Forces Covenant Award which ranges in Bronze to Gold, with the provision of award based on the level of commitment by each organisation and institution. With a particular focus on veterans' affairs, the Forces in Mind Trust in collaboration with Nacro, continues to produce valuable research around the needs of ex-forces personnel involved with the criminal justice system from 2021 onwards (See: The Forces in Mind Trust, 2021). This research is vital is understanding the needs of the forensic population who identify as a veteran.

1.4   Veteran Needs and Support

Existing veteran research in the UK has also shed light on the gaps in support for veterans. Given the focus of this study on the needs and experiences of veterans across the life course, it is relevant at this point to contextualise this by providing a brief overview of the support landscape for veterans.

1.4.1   Formal Support

Of the range of support needs experienced by those transitioning out of service, employment has been positioned as key. Several studies note the difficulty some veterans experience in finding suitable employment and the difficulties veterans face in retraining (See: Albertson, Irving and Best, 2015; Demers, 2011). This is particularly true for female veterans as the research has highlighted higher unemployment rates for female veterans compared to male veterans (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019). For veterans facing redundancy, the need for a smooth transition into civilian employment is paramount. This process be difficult as research has found veterans to be subjected to stigma, employment discrimination and bias during the screening process (Keeling, Kintzle, and Castro, 2018). The social stigma or 'moral panic' attached to the veteran population has led to veterans historically being twice as likely to be unemployed compared to civilians with similar experiences (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019; Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019; Jakobsen, 2000). Additionally, for those who leave the service early, gaining access to employment becomes more challenging if they have left education early prior to joining the service or have involvement with the criminal justice system (Buckman *et al.*., 2013). In recent years the MoD reported an improvement in the provision of transitional support, and in 2019 noted that veterans were equally as likely to be employed as their civilian counterparts, with a 79% employment rate in the UK (Ministry of Defence, 2019). In Scotland, veterans have remained less likely to be in work (70% vs 77%) with a higher probability of being unemployed (25% vs 19%) than the general population (Ministry of Defence, 2019). This suggests that employment remains an area of vulnerability for many going through the transition process.

To support newly transitioning veterans' individuals, larger national programmes such as the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) have been on hand to support veterans with a variety of transition support since 1980. However, programmes such as these ensure that employment remains at the forefront of the civilian reintegration process,

rather than focusing on the wider implications of military service (i.e. homelessness, poor mental health, PTSD) (Ministry of Defence, 2020). Over time, support from these programmes have incorporated housing and financial management as a response to the identified needs of the veteran community. MoD research has reported that 88% of veterans were reported to be back into education, employment or voluntary roles within six months of transitioning during 2018-2019 (Ministry of Defence, 2019), suggesting positive outcomes from this work. During this same fiscal year, the increase in ESL accessing employment increased from 79% to 83% due to the development of the Future Horizons programme (Ministry of Defence, 2019). However, these calculations reflect the MoD data being informed by CTP 'billable' hours, rather than a review of the whole veteran population. As such, this data only reflects the experiences of those who have been engaged in the employment transition programmes (Ministry of Defence, 2020). For those who do not engage in transitional support, the number of which is unknown, the successful journey into civilian life after service is highly underrepresented in the literature (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019).

In addition to employment, housing and mental health are also noted as the best predictors of whether veterans experience challenges in civilian life (Buckman *et al.*, 2013; Murphy and Busuttil, 2015). As such, more recently the MoD's Defence Transition Service (DTS) has expanded support beyond employment, to focus areas such as personal finance, accessing health care, housing and council related issues (Ministry of Defence and Veterans UK, 2020). Inroads have also been made to enhance support during service for issues and experiences which could subsequently impact transitions. For example, the Ministry of Defence has adopted and implemented the Traumatic Risk Management (TRiM) system across the Armed Forces to provide personnel with a system of post incident management (Greenberg, Langston and Jones, 2008). As a result, TRiM has operated as a peer-support driven intervention that helps organisations deal with the psychological aftermath of traumatic events, with particular benefit to the military for over a decade (Whybrow, Jones and Greenberg, 2015).

However, this type of support is not always appropriate for veterans struggling with the civilian transition as their challenges extend beyond employment and social isolation. Moreover, many programmes stop short of providing a full range of support and others are limited in the support they can give to early service leavers. Ultimately,

these gaps in support are particularly salient when we consider those who ultimately become involved with the criminal justice system (Klein *et al.*, 2012).

1.4.2 Developing Understandings of the Veteran Identity

Although arguably less attended to in some arenas, research has provided a greater understanding of the impact of institutionalisation and the loss of military identity during the transition process (Goffman, 1961). For those with longer service histories, the risks associated with institutionalisation evolve as a reliance on the military develops. This reliance can present itself as a form of arrested development in those leaving the military, especially when the individual joined while under the age of eighteen (Hurrelmann and Quenzel, 2013). The inability to move beyond the age their age of enlistment through the reliance on the military for food, clothing, housing, financial management, health and safety is not inexplicitly cited as a consequence of arrested development or military service in the literature. Although research highlights the impact of having poor financial management, poor emotional regulation and difficulty adjusting to self-reliance have also been reported as key factors impacting the military to civilian transition (See: MacManus and Wessely, 2013; Albertson, Irving and Best, 2015; Banks and Albertson, 2018). Additional considerations around veteran identity, shame, and the impact of institutionalisation have added to the conversation about what factors contributor poor help Seeking behaviours in the veteran population (Crocker *et al.*, 2019; Wainwright *et al.*, 2016). The lack of a de-institutionalisation process to support veterans with the return to civilian life and loss of veteran identity, ultimately remains a gap in the landscape of support.

1.4.3 Adjusting to Civilian Life

As deployment, anxiety, and depression were cited as reasons for poor mental health, suicidal tenancies and suicide in the veteran population, there is potential to identify these challenges prior to the military to civilian transition (Bergman *et al.*, 2017). However, research has found a larger percentage of soldiers' and veterans attempt and commit suicide during the civilian transition rather than prior to leaving the service (Kapur *et al.*, 2009; Bergman *et al.*, 2022). Research has cited numerous potential contributors to these individuals being at a greater risk (i.e. sudden loss of identity, homelessness, family breakdown, and poor socio-economic prospects) (Bergman *et al.*, 2017; Inoue *et al.*, 2022; Kapur *et al.*, 2009; Deahl *et al.*, 2011).

Although the risk of suicide is greater for those who have left prior to completion of training, which suggests veterans with longer time in service can be protected by the 'healthy worker effect' (Bergman *et al.*, 2022; Brewster, McWade and Clark, 2021). As individuals with more time in have had longer to develop their veteran identities, it could be the challenges that arise from family breakdowns and PTSD that contribute to their being at risk of poor mental health and suicide later in life, rather than their length of service (Inoue *et al.*, 2022). However, there is a consistent lack of data around the number of veterans that attempt to navigate these difficulties by accessing the NHS mental health services, charity mental health services and private mental health services, which impedes how we support this particular population (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

For those who experience difficulties with psychological adjustment and onsets of emotional distress, a lack of willingness to engage in help Seeking or a lack of help available can lead to self-harm and suicide (Bergman *et al.*, 2017; Inoue *et al.*, 2022; Kapur *et al.*, 2009; Deahl *et al.*, 2011). These barriers are of considerable importance to the veteran population, as it is not just them they are potentially harming, but their families and communities as well. In 2022, the US veteran suicide rates were at the highest level ever recorded with over 6,000 veterans committing suicide each year, representing a 30% increase from 1999-2016 (Inoue *et al.*, 2022). The number of veterans that committed suicide in Canada, which has a similar military subscription size to that of the US, were comparable to the number reported by the UK from 2017-2020.

For UK veterans, research has found the suicide rate to be up to three times higher when personnel are under the age of twenty-four, with personnel being most vulnerable within twenty-four months of leaving (Bergman *et al.*, 2021; Kapur *et al.*, 2009). However, a recent study on the prevalence of suicide amongst the Scottish veteran population reported that veterans do not present a higher risk of suicide overall, which challenges previous research highlighting veterans as being at a greater risk when compared to the civilian population (Almond, 2022; Bergman *et al.*, 2022). Although the UK has significantly lower instances of suicide amongst the veteran population, it is difficult to ascertain whether this is due to actual low instances of suicide or if the numbers are misrepresented due to poor data collection processes (Kapur *et al.*, 2009; Berman *et al.*, 2022).

In the UK and Canada, less than three veterans were reported to have committing suicide per day vs the US which reported 22 veterans per day as having committed suicide during this same period (Ministry of Defence, 2021). Having similar vulnerability factors reported, yet such varying statistics with relation to suicide and self-harm for veterans raises questions about causation and contributors to suicide and self-harm. Equally, the UK, US and Canada have experienced shifts in their deployment operations since 2012, changes to their infrastructures and made improvements to their help Seeking campaigns (Ministry of Defence, 2021). However, the research has only been able to speculate as to why the countries differ in this way. Potential reasons are cited as differences in deployment operations, differences in health care settings, cultural differences, and the impact of media representation on veteran identity in civilian life (VanTil *et al.*, 2018). Ultimately, this research suggests that within the UK and internationally there is an urgent need to address the challenges faced in the transition process as a means to not just protect the transitional process and the individuals view of military service, but their lives. This study seeks to contribute to this, by providing insight into how negative views of help seeking contribute to difficulties accessing the support so desperately needed to have a 'successful' transition into civilian life.

1.4.4   Challenges to accessing Veteran Support

Within the veteran community, there remains an overly complicated picture of various types of support available to veterans. Due to the large number of registered charities that support veterans, veterans often report a form of cognitive saturation that ultimately has been found to be a detriment to their wellbeing (Klein *et al.*, 2012). According to The UK Armed Forces Charity Sector: A Summary of Provision Report (2018), there were 'around' 187 charities registered that mention supporting the armed forces and their families. Many of these charities advertise a different ethos or purpose, target a different 'type' of veteran, compete for limited funding streams and report hugely varying requirements for engagement. The competitive environment in which these charities currently operate can leave a veteran who is seeking help to feel saturated by the varied and potentially misplaced support on offer, which can lead to a withdrawal from the help Seeking process altogether (Klein *et al.*, 2012). Sadly, many veterans who do seek help face exclusion from several of the charities as those with more severe

mental health challenges, drug and alcohol addiction or a history of offending are often left unable to meet the threshold for support set out by the charities.

Research continues to highlight how the needs of veterans with additional needs (i.e. early service leavers, those with disabilities) remain unmet. By way of concluding this overview of support, it is important to note that this remains particularly true for justice involved veterans (See: The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; The Ministry of Justice Report on Veterans Needs, 2014). While strides have been made through the development of working groups, such as the Ex-Service Offenders Working Group (ESOWG), the type of support available to justice involved veterans varies depending on geographical location and resource allocation. Allowing for a gap in the provision of support for veterans in the criminal justice to endure (UK Parliament, 2015).

1.5   Veterans and the Criminal Justice System

Thus far, this chapter has outlined characteristics of the veteran population in the UK, the research landscape, and provided insight into the needs of veterans and existing support as they transition. These issues have largely been identified as significant challenges facing the veteran population, with offending and involvement in the criminal justice system emerging as a key negative outcome in the salient literature. This thesis will focus on the experiences of a particular population of veterans – those incarcerated within the criminal justice system. By way of introduction to the specific characteristics of this group, this section provides an overview of the justice involved veteran population, the potential causes of offending by this population cited in salient literature, and the specific challenges facing this group.

1.5.1   The Justice Involved Veteran Population

Current evidence that speaks to the number of justice involved veterans in the UK remains unreliable due to challenges with reporting and self-identification (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019). A lack of longitudinal data on veterans involved with the criminal justice system furthers this debate. In 2009, the Veterans in Prison (VIP) group won their campaign for the collection of definitive veteran statistics. However, the Ministry of Justice did not collect entirely complete data on this cohort until 2014 (Ministry of Justice, 2015). During this period, research found that 8.5% of the justice involved population were ex-military (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Soon after,

the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) challenged these findings with reports of 3% of the prison population being ex-military, which is similar to the number reported by the MoJ in 2019 (Ministry of Justice Analytical Series, 2014).

More historic research has been exploring the prevalence of offending amongst the veteran population for some time. The National Association for Probation Officers conducted a study in 2009, which resulted in similar results to a 2011 study by the Howard League for Penal Reform (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; NAPO, 2009). Amongst the findings, both institutes noted the number of incarcerated veterans to be much higher than originally reported, with further insights into the prevalence of sexual offending amongst the veteran population (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; NAPO, 2009). Research by the Howard League found that in comparison to the civilian population, ex-service personnel were incarcerated for sexual offences at a rate of 25% compared to 11% reported by the MoJ (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011). Following this, in 2017, the number of prisoners with experiences in the Armed Forces was reported as 5% of the prison population. Further, veterans were reported as disproportionately represented in the serious violent offences and sexual offences category (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011). However, these numbers remain contested due to poor evaluation process and issues with veterans' self –identify themselves within the criminal justice system.

More recently, the national databases retaining to the number of veterans involved with the criminal justice system between England and Wales reported veteran data that aligned with Scottish data. This alignment has allowed for a more factual representation of the number of prisoners to be represented accurately (Office for Veterans' Affairs, 2020). However, the challenge of self-identification remains an inherent challenge to those aiming to understand the full scope of justice involved veterans (Flack and Kite, 2021; Martin, 2017; Dandeker *et al.*, 2006). The importance of this process extends beyond bureaucratic obligations, as policies and best practice cannot be addressed without having a factual account of the number of veterans involved with the criminal justice system needing support.

Research has speculatively identified offending behaviour to be more common amongst veterans who have been out of the service for more than ten years, with only a small percentage reporting criminal behaviour within a year of service (MacManus *et al.*, 2015; Wainwright *et al.*, 2016). Significantly less is known about those who leave

the military through a military corrective training centre (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Van Staden *et al*., 2007). While some research has identified pre-enlistment behaviours to increase the likelihood of offending post military service, there is research that offers age and time in service as alternatives to the causation of crime (Cooper *et al*., 2017; MacManus *et al*., 2011). However, socio demographic differences between the veteran and non-veteran population remain a key consideration as to why some veterans are more prone to violence and sexual offending (Cooper *et al*., 2017; Finlay *et al*., 2019; Bouffard, 2003).

In 2021, the number of veterans incarcerated in Scotland has surpassed the approximated 3% of veterans in prison to 3.2% from 2019-2020, with significant representation amongst violent and sexual offences (the Scottish Government, 2021). While the correlation between different types of offences and military service remains largely underrepresented in the literature, violent and sexual offences are widely represented amongst the veteran prison population, both in the UK and internationally (See: Albano, 2002; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Finlay *et al.*, 2019; MoD, 2020; Scottish Prison Service, 2020a). However, as stated, research has found that veterans represent a higher proportion of offenders incarcerated for sexual offences compared to the civilian population, with an even higher percentage of veterans being incarcerated for violence related offences compared to the civilian population (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Elbogen *et al.*, 2014; Cooper *et al.*, 2017). This is particularly relevant to Scotland, as the increased number of justice involved veterans means a potentially higher number of veterans involved in sexual offending in Scotland as well. As a response to the challenges in Scotland specifically, the development of a progressive approach to supporting veterans in Scotland included the implementation of the Veteran in Custody Support Officer (VICSO) programme within the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). The VICSO's facilitate recreational events and provide opportunities for the veterans in custody with opportunities to engage in periods of belonging with fellow veterans that may be otherwise lacking (the Scottish Government, 2016). Important to the context of this research, the provision of support provided to justice involved veterans in Scotland is noted as progressive and potentially influential in the pathways towards desistance for some justice involved veterans.

1.5.2   Contributors to Offending for the Veteran Population

In 2008, the MoD reported a concern for the lack of information about the experiences of veterans involved with the criminal justice system in the UK. As a way to address this, in 2016, the MoD publicly earmarked £4.6 million in research funding to address this gap of knowledge (Ministry of Defence, 2008; Ministry of Defence, 2016). During this time, research has advocated for there to be a separation amongst future works looking to examine the experiences of veterans by addressing the needs of the veteran offender separately from any research that explores the impact of military service on society (Burdett *et al.*, 2012; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Treadwell, 2010). To explore these issues separately would open up the discourse around the military's contribution and accountability to society, while also strengthening the evidence needed to improve the provision of support to the veteran population.

Historically, research that examines the relationship between military service and offending behaviour has historically given priority to understanding the impact of alcohol misuse on returning soldiers and the rehabilitation of military offenders after World War II (Hakeem, 1946; Wagley, 1944; Lang, 1965). However, the provision of support has been mainly through forensic and mental health settings to the potential detriment of the veteran community. As such, studies have advocated that alcohol addiction in particular be treated in community settings rather than within the criminal justice system, as addiction is better defined as mental health problem rather than a criminal offense (Hakeem, 1946; Wagley, 1944). However, the findings of research such as this has not always been put into clinical practice and studies have shown that drug and alcohol misuse are more closely correlated with incarceration than other social issues. For example, issues such as homelessness and domestic violence are more often treated in community settings, compared to alcohol related issues which are reported to contribute to a higher prevalence of alcohol misuse related charges amongst the male veteran population (Timko *et al.*, 2020).

As a consequence, male veterans are considered to be more likely to be incarcerated in civilian life, which contributes to a large body of research that addresses the needs of this population after they leave the military, rather than exploring any instances of offending while still in military service (Metraux and Culhane, 2004). As such, difficult transitional experiences have been found to be linked back the increased

propensity to engage in excessive alcohol use while in military service as alcohol has a long history of being utilised as a means to belong in military culture (Hakeem, 1946; Wagley, 1944). However, there are fewer studies that speak to these experiences. Further, there is a gap in the literature around how other forms of offending should be handled from an institutional perspective and whether prison is the appropriate setting for veterans who commit nonviolence related offences (Tsai *et al.*, 2016; Moran and Turner, 2022).

Alongside addiction, mental health is also typically cited as a key driver in offending, particularly violent offending, by those with military experience. The UK Armed Forces Covenant has stated on several occasions that PTSD is an overused explanation for the behaviour of veterans (Ministry of Defence, 2000). As such, poor mental health and substance misuse often contribute to their offending rather than PTSD, alongside other risk factors such as homelessness and unemployment. All of which warrant further attention in the literature (Ministry of Defence, 2000).

Further, the research highlights that feelings of being unprepared for the transition from military to civilian life can influence an individual's likelihood to engage in offending behaviours as they may be unprepared to access the support systems they need (Molendijk, Kraner and Verweij 2015). Unfortunately, research has identified that as much as a 14-year lapse between end of service and accessing services for combat related concerns such as PTSD symptoms, anger and aggression and sleep disturbances can exist for the veteran population (Deahl, Klein and Alexander, 2011). Reluctance to access support may be further compounded by experiences of trauma pre-enlistment, low socio-economic status, instances of offending, instances of homelessness, and financial instability (Cooper *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, research highlights that the longer a veteran waits to access services, the more complex accessing timely support can become (Deahl, Klein and Alexander, 2011). While not all veterans struggle with the civilian transition, research has advocated for any necessary support to be offered to veterans swiftly after leaving the service. However, the MoD retains a policy that limits some types of support to two years post military service (Castro, Kintzle and Hassan, 2015). Consequently, the current time limitation does not allow for many veterans to engage in the process of recognition and acceptance of needing help, as many challenges may not arise until years after leaving (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008; Castro, Kintzle and Hassan, 2015).

1.5.3 Gaps in Support Systems

Research highlights that often veterans lead chaotic lives and the exclusion from formal support from organisations has wider implications for veterans and their families, as both isolation from families and increased instances of domestic violence can occur (Directory of Social Change, 2019). The importance of intimacy amongst interpersonal relationships is noted in the research as greatly impactful to a veterans' vulnerability to suicide, self-harm, drug and alcohol dependency, homelessness and family breakdowns during the transition period (Moran and Turner, 2022; Tsai *et al.*., 2014). It is during this time, that a lack of support can lead to a veteran being untreated for a mental health condition, have low employment or education prospects, or lead to social isolation once outside of the military. These factors in turn contribute to a veteran having an increased likelihood of offending on the return to civilian life (Bouffard, 2003; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011). Although research that considers the combined impact of trauma exists, there is a paucity of research that explores the combined impact of social deprivation, adverse childhood experiences (ACE's), masculinity and youth offending in relation to help seeking. This gap of knowledge, while decreasing, continues to influence what is understood about how veterans with complex lives engage in desistance (McGarry and Walklate 2011; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Murray, 2013). Further, much of the research that does address these challenges explores alcohol misuse, untreated PTSD, combat related trauma and more common mental health problems as being contributors to crime, especially violent crime, rather than exploring a more macro view of contributors (Macmanus *et al.*, 2013; Elbogen *et al.,* 2014). Therefore, much of what is known about how pre-enlistment factors contribute to offending while in military service and after remains tenuous.

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) further acknowledges the lack of research around military families, particularly those experiencing violence and crime once leaving the military, as impactful to the field of veteran research. The Military Families and Transitions CSJ report (2016) advocates for more research in the field by calling for the MoD to fund specific research into the frequency of domestic abuse amongst veterans along with the drivers and the most effective means of prevention and treatment. While the prevalence of intimate partner violence amongst the veteran offender population is speculative, research into the relationship between PTSD and intimate partner violence has advanced what we understand about how violence can

manifest in interpersonal relationships (Alves- Costa *et al.*, 2022). Although much of the existing body of research continues to lack a comprehensive view as to why veterans engaged in violence in this way.

1.5.4   Veteran Identity and the 'Offender Penalty'

Research that highlights the relationship between veteran identity and offender identity for the veteran population addresses self-identification as a challenging experience for veterans in custody due to shame, public perception of what a veteran is and a lack of conscious acknowledgment of the impact of military service (Burdett *et al.*, 2012; Wagley, 1944; Dandeker *et al.*, 2006). For veterans who absorbed this identity shift unconsciously, difficulty self-identifying as a veteran is particularly relevant (Mitchell *et al.*, 2020).

This process is a particular challenge for veterans with a life history that involves offending from a young age as the military can be seen as a motivator towards desistance (Teachman and Tedrow, 2016; Maruna, 2017; Abeling-Judge, 2020). However, when their military careers end, the veteran is left having to return to civilian life, often within the support systems needed to succeed, potentially leading to a return towards offending, rather than away from it (Stone, 2019; Laub, Nagin and Sampson, 1998; Jardine, 2017). Importantly, often those with an offending history have difficulties accessing support as there is an 'offender penalty' that is applied to the individual once they are involved with the criminal justice system. This stigma extends beyond their interpersonal relationships or direct support systems but into charities and organisations that claim to support the veteran population. In 2019, only 1.6% of military charities reported the provision of support to veterans in the criminal justice system (Directory of Social Change, 2019). The limited provision of support from these charities highlights a smaller contribution of support available to those who may be facing challenges such as homelessness, mental and physical health issues or addiction. Further increasing the potential for individuals to seek out alternative methods to coping with civilian life such as drugs, alcohol, and offending (Cid and Marti, 2012; Copp *et al.*, 2019).

1.6   Gaps in the Literature and Original Contribution

The body of research outlined here explores a strong research landscape of veterans in the UK, within which justice involved veterans have emerged as a

significant theme of interest. These studies provide insights and understanding of the needs and experiences of justice involved veterans, identifying issues such as alcohol misuse, a lack of civilian life preparation and homelessness as potentially contributing to offending pathways. Further, the literature explored within this introduction explores the landscape of the UK military, some of the considerations with relation to the recruitment of young people, the challenges individuals contend with prior to enlistment and the challenges that veterans can face in civilian life. However, much of what is known about the pathway towards incarceration for the veteran population remains unexplored from an interdisciplinary lens. Additionally, much of what is known about the prevalence of trauma related disorders in military personnel remains unexplored outside of the PTSD lens. Explored throughout the thesis, the barriers to support for young people involved with offending and the gaps in knowledge around young veterans and offending behaviours has been noted.

What is, arguably, still missing in this area is research which brings together various disciplinary perspectives (i.e. sociology, psychology, health) to develop and consolidate our understanding of these experiences and their impact across the veteran life course. This study seeks to build upon and contribute to this research landscape through an interdisciplinary approach in Scotland which provides both sociological and psychological insight into the veteran journey. In doing so, the study examines subjects of transitions, barriers to help seeking and veteran identity as a means to understand how the transition from military service to incarceration can occur and ultimately be lessened.

Subsequently, this research contributes to what is known about how negative experiences transitioning, poor social support systems, trauma and dysfunctional identities can negatively influence military service, potentially increasing an individuals' vulnerabilities to serious offending across the life course. The research has identified the complex way in which the military could be seen as complicit in the pathways towards offending for some, due to the increased ways in which the military recruit young people from vulnerable backgrounds. Across the life span, the findings of this research highlights how influential the military can be when supporting young people going through psychosocial and psychological transitions. As such, when the military is negligent in the provision of timely support, individuals with pre-enlistment experiences of offending may be more likely to re-engage with offending behaviours

after experiencing a negative transition out of military service. For many, the military can be a positive contributor to desistance, community engagement and positive views of the self. However, for those with experiences of adversity in childhood, military service can be experienced as another ACE to content with.

It is important at this point to acknowledge the abundance of literature, both UK based and international, around the veteran experience which sits beyond the scope of this study. Literature that addresses the diversity challenges in the military (See: Rohall *et al.*, 2017; Scoppio, 2009; Baker, 2022), the impact of deployment on military personnel and their families (See: Negrusa *et al.*, 2014; Thandi *et al.*, 2017; Pye and Simpson, 2017), Post Traumatic Stress and Combat related mental health (See: Haagen *et al.*, 2015; Murphy *et al.*, 2019; Schultebraucks *et al.*, 2020), veteran homelessness (See: Perl, 2014; Culhane *et al.*, 2020), veteran and family dynamics (See: Keeling *et al.*, 2020; Bussemakers *et al.*, 2019; Bailey and Klein, 2018) and veteran drug and alcohol misuse (See: Thandi *et al.*, 2015; Meadows *et al.*, 2022; Kiernan *et al.*, 2016; Murphy and Turgoose, 2019) are topics that could be not be fully explored within this study.

1.7   Position of the Researcher

A key principle of the qualitative research paradigm is that research data are always co-produced between the participant and the researcher (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). In many ways, my lived experiences along with my professional background have influenced the construction and outcome of this study. As a child of parents enlisted in the military, much of my childhood and adolescence was spent engulfed in military culture. During this time, I held two very formative identities. First, I was the daughter of an Officer. Second, I was a 'troublemaker' who received various forms of leniency for being the daughter of an Officer. Had my mother been anything but an Officer, my life trajectory could have been much different. A benefit of this leniency was the opportunity to elude prison institutionalisation, gain an education and train in the field of psychology. Over the last twenty years working in the field of mental health, I have worked with individuals who were not always afforded similar forms of privilege. Subsequently, my professional and personal experiences have contributed to the outcome of this study. I hope to the benefit of those who work tirelessly to support the military and veteran community.

1.7.1 Content Considerations

It felt prudent to provide the reader with a warning about the content contained within this study. Included in this thesis are narrations and insights around the participants' experiences of childhood sexual abuse and violence as victims and as perpetrators. Additionally, there is a reflection noted in the methodology chapter which explores the some of the implications for co-creating data between individuals with equally complex life histories that may be sensitive to read.

1.8 Thesis Structure

The thesis consists of eight chapters in total. Chapter one has provided a brief overview of the phenomenon being explored and provided a rationale for the study. The chapter highlights aspects of UK military culture that contributes to challenging transitions for military personnel.

Chapter two provides a review of the interdisciplinary literature that speaks to the needs of the veteran population. A conceptual framework emerges from the literature positioning the veterans within theories relating to institutions, social justice, transitions, adverse childhood experiences, trauma, masculinity, sexual offending, and life course theory. The literature review has prioritised these areas of research with the aim of providing a succinct representation of the lived experiences of these individuals in a relatively limited space. The chapter has concluded with the presentation of the research questions and an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter three follows with the methodology chapter. The chapter includes the rationale for a qualitative design, the study design, the data collection process and the analysis procedures. Discussions around reflexivity, power relationships and the co-construction of data were also explored. The chapter highlights the reflective challenges experienced by working with a population predominately incarcerated for violent and sexual crimes against women and children. A final postscript of the researchers' reflective practice sits towards the end of the chapter.

Chapter four, five and six present the findings of the study. In chapter four, the findings are presented in such a way that the experiences of childhood and early adolescence are explored with priority. In chapter five, the findings have been presented in a way that explores the experiences the veterans had as military personnel, fathers, partners, and offenders. Chapter six explores the motivators towards desistance and the

contributors to recidivism. The chapter concludes with recommendations for the military to better support veterans through the eyes of the veterans themselves. The following themes were constructed following analysis of the data: Family Ties, In for the Fight, Unprepared for the fight, The Path Regretted, Forced transitions, Grin and bear it, Fragile Futures and Psychic Wounds Unhealed.

Chapter seven discusses the significance of the findings and incorporated a discussion that critically addressed the literature that speaks to the voice of the participants and their lived experiences. This chapter further discusses the importance of considering the veteran as existing within a relational and cultural context, with a need for better support during the numerous transitions justice involved veterans experience from enlistment onwards. Strengths and limitations of the study, in addition to policy implications and recommendations are identified and discussed.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis with a final exploration of the research study. A further exploration of the limitations of the thesis is discussed, as are the potential contributions that can be made to both clinical and research settings. Recommendations for future research are explored with a particular focus on barriers to help seeking and desistance

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the conceptual and theoretical backdrops that informs what is known about the lived experiences of veterans involved with the UK criminal justice system. The literature review discusses a range of the developments in theory, research and examples of practice that explore the relationships that exist between military service and offending behaviour. The chapter identifies gaps and inconsistencies within the existing literature, creating a space to claim the original contribution offered by this study. Literature on military culture, mental health, childhood adversity, institutions, transitions, pathways to crime and desistance are presented. Additional topics have also been explored and included where they may shine some light on the varied types of research available that could be considered insightful to the veteran support discourse, whilst not being necessary pivotal for this doctoral research study.

The chapter will predominantly draw on sociology, criminology and psychology research, in order to explore the links that exist between pre military experiences, military service and incarceration. Literature outside of these disciplines has also been highlighted, as the scoping review of the literature search has provided findings in fields such as education, business management and health and social care. Diverse literatures, including grey literature, and research across a range of different methodologies, theoretical and philosophical perspectives are represented in order to explore the breadth and depth of empirical data and conceptual developments that exists around this subgroup. The expansive body of work consulted reflects the fact that this veteran population has a complex and relatively unique set of life experiences that requires a more holistic understanding.

Assembling a coherent presentation of the literature, in light of everything explained above, has required quite some thought. Other options to what have been constructed in this chapter were considered – such as a logic of presenting by disciplinary area, for example. However, a structure that speaks to dominant issues that loosely connect to a temporal sequencing has been devised. Before the body of literature is presented in this kind of order, it is imperative that key details about the research strategy and the outcomes that have produced this review and thus the basis of the study are presented. This information is presented in section 2.2 which immediately follows

this introduction. Thereafter, section 2.3 focusses on the changing role and perceptions of the military in UK society. Psycho-social considerations around those that enlist for military service as youths are presented in section 2.4. The chapter then moves on to consider what is known about the transition journey out of service. The role, indeed, the concept of the family, is an important element in these transitions to, through and from military service and considerations of its place and impact are presented in section 2.6. The final body of work presented in section 2.7 examines what is known about the nature of criminality and desistance amongst the veterans' population and the relationship to military service. The chapter is brought to an end by contemplating any limitations the reader ought to be aware of in the literature review undertaken, followed by the research aims, objectives and questions that have been led to this study.

2.2   Literature Review Search Strategy

As the primary aims of this exploratory study were pursued through an interdisciplinary approach, a scoping review of literature was conducted. A scoping review allowed for diverse literature sources to be explored as a means to uncover evidence, explore a range of topics and identify concepts and gaps that exist about the research study topic (Grant and Booth, 2009). Following the principles of a scoping review facilitates comprehensive search results and ensures quality research is incorporated into the study (Long, French and Brooks, 2020; Grant and Booth, 2009). The following section describes the review process as outlined by social sciences protocols recommended in the literature (Gant and Booth, 2009; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006).

2.2.1   Search Strategy

The initial speculative search strategy sought literature that considered the following:

- Theoretical models of transitions, life course disruption, and turning points
- Empirical studies highlighting the pathways to crime for the veteran population
- Conceptual literature around the theory of desistance, sexual offending and identity
- Theoretical literature around adverse childhood experiences and mental health

As an increasingly refined and systematic search strategy developed, the databases named below were searched routinely from September 2017-March 2019. In the early

stages of this interdisciplinary study, search strategies focussed on individual disciplines. As knowledge of the research landscape developed and was shaped by the emerging findings from the primary data, searches became more focussed on issues and concepts. Over the course of the study, new searches occurred routinely to ensure new literature was identified, with particular effort following two periods of interruption. A final search was conducted in February 2023, which utilised research from the following databases:

- MEDLINE, PsycINFO, and EMBASE
- ProQuest, Scopus, and JSTOP
- The Cochrane Library and Mendeley

In addition to usual academic data bases and repositories, wider online searches and the chasing up of others' bibliographic citations led to further important literatures being identified. Key sites include:

- Office for National Statistics websites
- The NHS publication and reports depository
- The House of Commons publication and reports depository
- The Ministry of Defence publication and reports depository
- The Ministry of Justice publication and reports depository

Additional literature were identified through wider online searches and following up of others bibliographies or material referred to during my involvement in various professional networks for example. Outside of the scope of commercial publications, grey literature has provided valuable insights to the thesis through various forms (i.e. academic papers, committee reports, working papers, academic dissertations, and conference papers). As such, the literature that informs this thesis aimed to include literature that may not otherwise be disseminated, further attempting to provide a balanced view of what is understood about the needs of incarcerated veterans (Paez 2017).

2.2.2 Search Terms

The primary literature search was conducted using a combination of subject headings and free- text (See: Table 1). Relevant terms were combined within several disciplines to identify any intersections that may exist amongst the literature. Boolean

operators were also utilised to identify the literature that may sit amongst several disciplines (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006).

Veteran offenders	Incarcerated veterans	Scottish veterans
Violence	Identity	Adverse childhood experiences
Early service leavers	Masculinity/men/male	Families
Desistance	Transitions	Military families
Institutions/ Institutionalisation	Turning points	Violence
Prison	Criminal Justice	Sexual offending
Mental Health	Post traumatic stress disorder	Re-integration
Barriers to help seeking	Life course	Justice Involved
Youth offending	Shame	Offending

Table 1: Key search terms

The inclusion criteria of the literature were not constricted by date as historical debates and issues are still relevant to more contemporary discourses around the needs of the veteran population. More recent literature is highlighted with priority in the thesis to showcase recent contributions to the discourse. Articles not printed in English were excluded for the purposes of this study, as were literature where the full text could not be acquired.

2.2.3 Quality Assurance

Research has long explored the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research due to potential for bias in both the research and the interpretation (Elo *et al.*, 2014). While this thesis utilised a range of literature and resources to guide it, the validity of the research incorporated within was considered at all stages. Whilst academic databases can provide a degree of surety around quality, in terms of the peer review and publication procedures, there is no room for complacency and evaluations of quality when undertaking research. Therefore, both the commercially published works and the grey literature were assessed for quality with equal rigour (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017). Further, the search criteria have been developed alongside the *Eight 'Big Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research* developed by Tracey (2010), in order to provide a level of continuality and consistency to occur, as this criteria was utilised for

the research design of this research study (See: Table 2)[5]. The alignment of this tool is further explored in Chapter Three.

As this was not a systematic review with rigid inclusion/exclusion criteria, the potential for selection bias may have been elevated. Consequently, protocols were developed in order to address any concerns. As such, considerations around whether the literature had not explained the research design in sufficient detail, or acknowledged the ethical implications of the research, or the positionality of the researcher were occasionally made (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). However, due to the quality of literature produced around the thesis topic, decisions such as these were rare.

Additionally, the research supervisors were a key part of the internal validation process for the study and have questioned and provided feedback on the literature search strategies and result at several stages. Further, a qualitative content analysis method was utilised, as a means to ensure the data and the interpretation of the literature aligns with the research study and aims. As such, the literature was condensed and placed into themes at various stages to ensure a constant comparison of the literature was being conducted (Schreier, 2012).

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[5] The original table developed by Tracey (2010) sits within Chapter Three, section 3.3.

Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve	How the literature within this study has been measured
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting	The topics of the research are • Relevant to the Moral Panic that is ascribed to Veterans and veterans issues • Timely due to the increase of UK veterans over the next 20 years.
Rich rigor	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex • Sociological and Psychological theories are addressed with priority • Identity theories are historically underpinned and evaluated with rigour • 80% of studies relate to military personnel specifically and include large pop. cohorts
Sincerity	The study is characterized by • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges	The studies are characterized by • Self-reflective and inclusive research that addresses the importance of terms such as 'offender' vs 'justice involved' • Having strong methodological and theoretical considerations explored
Credibility	The research is marked by • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflections	The research is marked by • Having strong social considerations • Providing examples of best practice that are derived from the research outcomes • Providing extensive information about the research process
Resonance	The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations • Transferable findings	The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through • Timely and relevant population representation • Findings that are transferable to this study
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically	The research provides a significant contribution • To what is understood about transitions • To what is understood about veterans • To what is understood about vulnerabilities to offending
Ethical	The research considers • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)	The research considers • The background of the participants • The external factors that influence military lives • The internal motivators towards desistance without judgement
Meaningful coherence	The study • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other	The study • Achieves a moral contribution to the literature • Provides meaningful foundation to the research that has been proposed here • Provides a clear rationale for the utilisation of methods and processes

Table 2: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research: Source: Tracy, 2010.

2.2.4   Search Results

The final Reference Manager database retrieved nine hundred and eighty relevant pieces of literature in the first instance. Due to the breadth the literature identified; the literature search results were narrowed to include a hierarchy based on geographical considerations. As a result of initial search, a multitude of research presented itself as potentially relevant to the primary research questions. Thus, the search strategy was narrowed to prioritise the available UK focused literature. However, as noted in the literature, the experiences of veterans have been more widely explored in a North American context (Iversen *et al*., 2005). Therefore, the research has been informed by national and international research. Upon narrowing the scope of the search, the final outcome was four hundred and seventy-six pieces of relevant literature.

2.3   Narrowing the Search Results

Once identified, the literature was evaluated utilising the following criteria:

- Is the literature based on UK veterans?
- If not UK veterans, does the veteran population have some relevance for UK veterans (i.e. have similar recruitment strategies, recruitment processes, structures)
- Does the literature focus on the experiences of veterans primarily? Are veterans a secondary consideration in the literature?
- Does the literature include theoretical considerations? Critical theoretical development; applies existing concepts; theory is absent.
- Does the literature clearly align with the research questions? does it have some relevance to the RQs? Is it currently irrelevant but potentially worth reviewing in future?

After applying these criteria, the total number of literature represented in the thesis has been limited to two hundred and fifty nine[6]. As the search was conducted over an extended period of time, the exact number of literature produced by each search was maintained through the use of Excel and organised by disciplines rather than by subject

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[6] The literature represented throughout the thesis was contained to this number as a means to ensure conciseness. Although as highlighted in the bibliography, a much higher number of references is cited as each body of literature that was read over the period of this research study has been deemed influential to the overall study and therefore, was deemed important to highlight in some capacity.

area. Within Chapter Three (Methodology), a rationale for the continuation of literature searches within different research paradigms will be explored. Highlighted below (See: Figure Fifteen) is a visual representation of the search process presented through a PRISMA flowchart as advocated in the literature (Moher *et al.*, 2009).
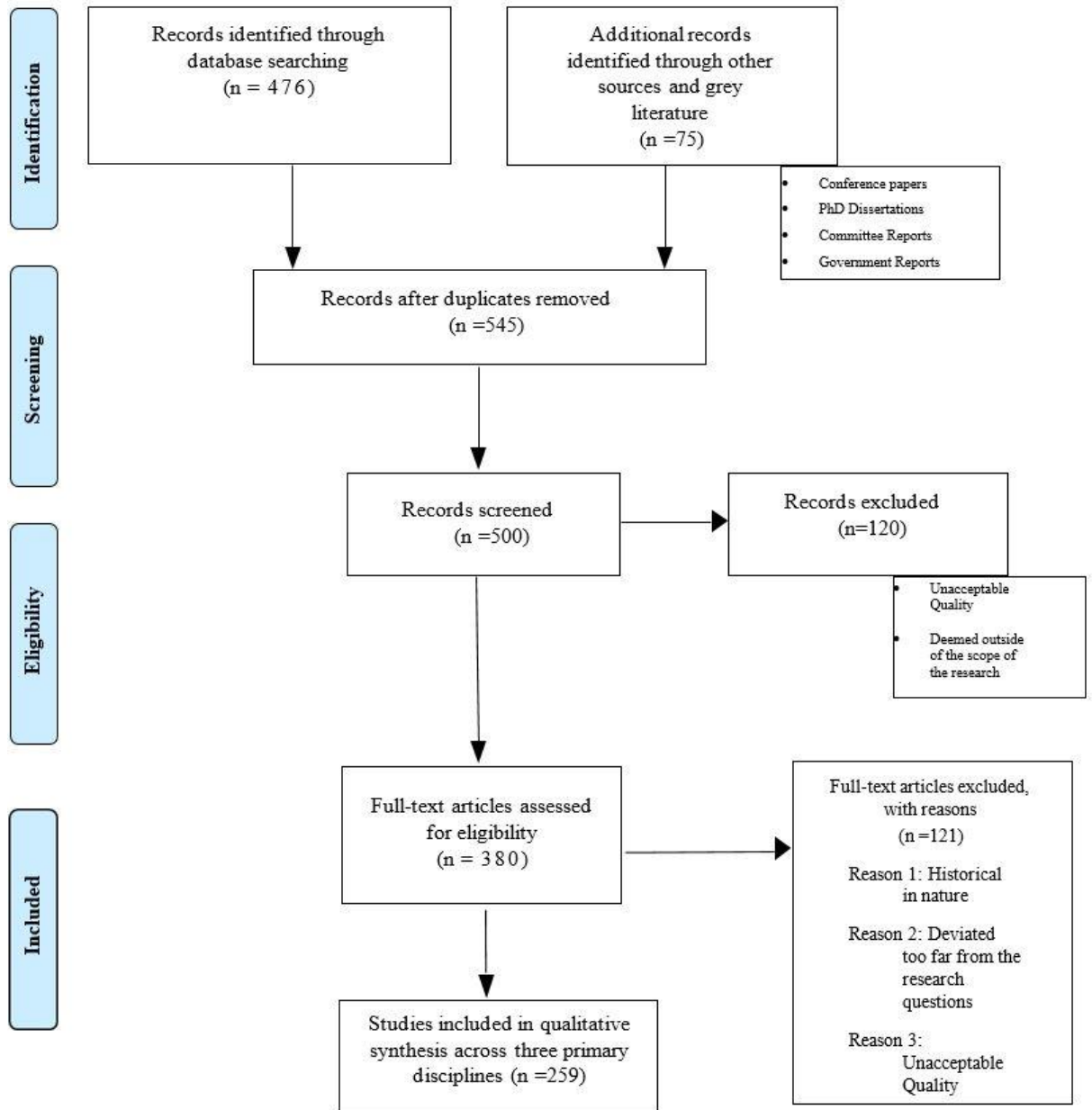
Figure 15: Literature Review P R I S M A S o u r c e : Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta- Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(7): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097

2.4 Literature Typology

A typology of the literature that informed this study is presented in Table 3 below. The typology has been constructed primarily as a means to showcase the

interdisciplinary approach that was taken to the research study, (Green, Johnson and Adams, 2006; Greenhalgh, Thorne and Malterud, 2018). The table has been constructed on a temporal dimension, to present an overview of seminal works in the research area within timescales that presented literature relevant to the research study and aims.

The advantage of presenting a typology in reviews such as this is highlighted in the literature as being primary a descriptive tool that allows the reader to organise the multidimensional nature of interdisciplinary research. Equally, typologies allow for different types of research to be equally illustrated, which is not always possible within the constraints of research (Greenhalgh, Thorne and Malterud, 2018). The resulting typology aims to give insight into how thinking across discipline lines can provide rich insights into the lived experiences of incarcerated veterans in Scotland.

Literature Review Typology

Typology of key literature by time period			
Dates	Seminal texts	Dominant Discipline	Main findings
2010 - 2022	Brewer and Herron, 2022	Multi-disciplinary	Explores how 'negative' transitional experiences influence an individual's life history. Suggests that the transition from military to civilian life is an important turning point in an individual's life and therefore merits more support than is currently available to veterans.
	Wilkinson, 2022	Multi-disciplinary	Explores the difficulty adjusting to the offender identity when experiencing the veteran identity first. Suggests that access to help seeking is hindered by feelings of shame and a loss of purpose following criminalisation.
	Gordon *et al.*, 2020	Multi-disciplinary	Explores the challenges faced by the veteran population. Suggests the lack of priority given in the literature to the interpersonal and pre-enlistment challenges that influence how a veterans transitions.
	Albertson, Banks and Murray, 2017	Multi-disciplinary	Explores the veteran to offender transition with a view of addressing best practice for veterans involved with the CJS. Suggests that service delivery does not meet the needs of the veteran population to the detriment of their civilian transition.
	Teachman and Tredrow, 2016	Sociology/ Criminology	Explores the relationship between military service and desistance from crime. Suggests the notion that military service does not serve as a motivator for all to desist.

	Bergman *et al.*, 2014	Multi-disciplinary	Explores the impact of military service on the individual and society. Suggests that the institutional culture that the military cultivates is influential on an individual's life history.
	Johansen *et al.*, 2013	Multi-disciplinary	Explores the relationship the impact of the organisational changes that are occurring in the military on the military identity. Suggests that historical representation and societal expectations of military service influence military identity and career trajectory.
1970 – 2010	Wertsch, 2006	Sociology/ Psychology	Explores the experiences of military personnel and that of their families. Suggests the motivations for enlistment and contributors to interpersonal stressors start in the pre-enlistment stage
	Dandeker *et al.*, 2006	Multi-disciplinary	Explores the relationship between veteran identity and support. Suggests that understand the veteran identity is an essential part of the civilian transition.
	Iversen *et al.*, 2005	Multi-disciplinary	Explores the transitional experiences of UK veterans. Suggests that the majority of veterans do not struggle in the civilian transition but those that do, struggle greatly.
	Segal, 1986	Sociology	Explores the military and families as 'greedy institutions' that influence how an individual copes when adjusting to meeting both interpersonal needs and that of the military. Suggests the military requires a 'splitting' which could hinder the veteran transition.
	Schlossberg, 1981	Psychology/ Sociology	Highlights a model developed to identify a systematic way in which to predict a human reaction to change or transition. Suggests that transitions when consciously address can be reacted to positively.
	Moskos and Program, 1981	Sociology	Highlights the ongoing discourse around the military's role. Suggests that the military continues to operate ambiguously between an institution and an employer.
1900-1970	Goffman, 1961	Sociology	Highlights the influence that institutions can have on the individual. Suggests that institutionalisation is experienced from birth and how one understands their socialisation informs their life histories.
	Erikson, 1950	Psychology	Highlights the developmental process of children and their identity transitions. Suggests how the development of identities are formed throughout childhood.
	Hakeem, 1946	Sociology/ Criminology	Highlights the historical nature of the concern for veterans returning from war. Suggests that the moral

			panic around the veteran community has primarily focused on social influences (alcohol misuse in the community) rather than interpersonal challenges (combat related trauma).
	Van Gennep, 1909	Anthropology	Highlights the processes that individuals can go through when experiencing transitions within a group or community setting. Suggests that the process of transitions can be influences by an individual's social environment and motivations.

Table 3: Literature Review Typology

2.5 Military in Society

This section explores studies that consider the relationship between the military and the society in which it sits. Unsurprisingly, the literature is predominately, although not entirely, sociological. Research that considers the *motivations to enlist* is presented first. A focus on *enlistment and desistance* follows, where the relationship between the perceived motivations to enter into military service that relate to violence/criminality is critically considered. This section ends by presenting literature around *societal views of veteran reintegration*, particularly in cases where challenges arise.

2.5.1 Motivation to Enlist

Historically, the UK military has provided progressive employment and training opportunities, the ability to progress within the military subculture, and the ability to engage with an institution often highly regarded amongst the wider society (Sampson and Laub, 2003; Wertsch, 2006). In contradiction, there is other evidence to suggest that the military has been historically viewed beyond the scope of being an employment provider, with deeply ingrained social capital spurring individuals into enlistment (Hines *et al.*, 2015). As such, reasons for the recruitment of individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds in particular has been viewed as exploitive by some within and outside of the military (Hines *et al.*, 2015).

More generally, the research has found that the motivations to enlist (i.e. provision of stability, education opportunities, institutional inclusion and self-development) have remained primarily the same over the last one hundred years, with employment ranking as high as institutional inclusion (Bachman *et al.*, 2000). More specifically, it has been found that for young people from lower socio-economic social

groups[7] in the UK, the military provides forms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that can help them overcome some of the barriers to social inclusion and mobility that they are likely to face due to the social circumstances in which they were born. Drawing on data that was derived from narrative case studies of justice involved veterans, Wilkinson (2022) shows how the decision to enlist can protect working-class recruits from any perceived educational failure that would affect their social standing. Wilkinson's (2022) study also indicated how perceptions of a further socially useful benefit was a factor in motivations to enlist among this social strata; enlistment was perceived as an opportunity to gain access to more valuable and socially profitable networks (i.e. social capital) which again fosters encouragement to join by peers, and from the wider social environment. The encouragement to enlist due to the social perceptions of benefits in the face of the limited volume of capitals due to the status of publicly funded education is therefore relatable (Willis, 1978; Bourdieu, 1986; Wilkinson, 2022).

Where individuals are joining the military from lower socio-economic backgrounds, enlistment is particularly viewed as a positive option for early school leavers and those with limited employment opportunities due to geographical locations (See: Bachman *et al.*, 2000; Helmus *et al.*, 2018; Lasselle and Johnson, 2020). Research on education in Scotland has found that the provision of educational opportunities is particularly impacted by geographical location, and those who come from the most deprived areas achieve poorer outcomes across all levels of education (Lasselle and Johnson, 2020). Consequently, the research has found that those who seek out the military as a means to leave challenging experiences and develop educational and professional experiences, may experience difficulty enlisting due to poor testing at recruitment or poor academic results in training camp (See: Gordon, Burnell and Wilson, 2020; Helmus *et al.*, 2018; Bachman *et al.*, 2000; Spence, Henderson and Elder, 2013). In some instances, the lack of success at the recruitment stage or within the early stages of enlistment can influence how an individual views themselves and their role in society, leading to difficult transitional periods throughout their lives (Malti *et al.*, 2015; Van Gennep, 1909).

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[7] In the literature, a variety of terms are employed for this social group, including working class, lower class, disadvantaged groups etc. A consideration of formal classification system is not included in this thesis due to the constraints and focus of the research study.

Further, whilst society holds a perception of the military as an organisation that provides opportunities to travel the world, participate in combat and engage in education[8] (Haigh *et al.*, 2012), the landscape of UK military service changed drastically from 2010, when a strategic goal to cut costs and modernise the military to fit the needs of a changing political and socioeconomic climate began (HM Government, 2010)[9]. As the military transitions from an historic role as being the 'managers of violence' to a more contemporary role primarily as employment providers, cultural and societal shifts continue to challenge its role in the modern age (Siebold, 2001; Zald, 1966). However, these shifts are not always made clear to individuals who seek military service as a way to develop their educational and employment potential as their recruitment materials continue to illustrate travel and training experiences with a high frequency. To illustrate, research with military veterans has found that having clear expectations was a key contributor to the 'good' transition out of military service (Malti *et al.*, 2015). As expectations of military engagement are often informed by historical social norms, the military has a duty to be clear about the expectations, obligations and rules of engagement (Arnett, 2015), even though research has found the reality of military service rarely matches expectations (Grimell, 2018; Helmus *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the military has a duty to ensure new recruits are capable of understanding their commitment to the military and the militaries commitment to them, as the landscape of military service is constantly evolving.

2.5.2 Enlistment and Desistance

Just as the military has been explored as a positive step towards education and employment opportunities for some (See: Helmus *et al.*, 2018; Elder jr, Gimbel and Ivie, 2009; Gordon, 2020), military enlistment has also been seen as a positive contributor towards desistance from criminal or anti-social behaviour (See: Teachman and Tredow, 2016; Milburn, 2012; Frana and Schroeder, 2008; Alker and Godfrey, 2016). Historically, military service has been offered as an alternative to a prison sentence, providing young people with an opportunity redefine themselves (Maruna, 2012). However, over time, the military begun excluding young people with offending

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[8] A reminder of the recruitment materials and relevant statistics highlighted in Chapter One, which highlights how the military continues to appear to offer opportunities that it may not be able to achieve.
[9] While the terms and conditions provided to individual recruits highlights the changes to military service contracts, social perception of military service is slow to catch up and therefore, many individuals may be unaware of how these changes will influence their time in service.

backgrounds from military service. More recently, potentially due to recruitment challenges, the military across all three branches, have allowed for recruits with offending backgrounds to join under various forms of special conditions (House of Commons, 2021).

Conceptual frameworks position 'desistance' as the process of change which involves an individual 'making good' on previous offending to assume a new 'redeemed' identity (Maruna, 1997; Bushway *et al.*, 2001; Sampson and Laub, 2003). Research has identified a positive correlation between desistance from crime and military service, especially for those with consistent experiences of delinquency (See: Frana and Schroeder, 2008; Sampson and Laub, 2003, Blosnich *et al.*, 2014). Frana and Schroeder (2008) identify the benefits of military service such as the provision of housing, stability and structure which can make a positive contribution to desisting from such patterns. Equally, the military in some instance can provide opportunities that may otherwise be attainable, such as access to driving lessons and forms of training (a variety of trades, including highly specialist technical skills). Thus, engaging in military life has often been seen as a way to redefine youth defiance and promote a transition into adulthood that is less affected by periods of offending and interpersonal difficulties (Bouffard, 2003). Subsequently, Bouffard (2003) suggest that joining the military can be a positive 'turning point' in an individual's life[10]. As the military can be viewed to allow opportunities for individuals to change the trajectory of their lives and their sense of self.

Alternatively, research has also proposed the idea that military service in truth acts as a conduit towards further offending (Hakeem, 1946; Bouffard, 2003; Van Schellen and Nieuwbeerta, 2012), and the militarisation of young people in crisis is in fact a detriment to society (Enloe, 2000). Further, the research also highlights how military service can foster violent tendencies and behaviours that might otherwise be discouraged or sanctioned. MacManus and Wessely (2013) reported a willingness for the military population to engage in violence that may not exist amongst the general population, subsequently highlighting how individuals may be more likely to join the

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[10] Turning point is used by Bouffard (2003) rather than simply a 'transition'. They assert that transition indicates movement, but turning point indicates more specifically something has changed (i.e. rather than merely progressed). In the context of the doctoral study, both 'turning points' and 'transitions' are explored as a means to understand the importance of meaning and identity later in the thesis.

military should acts of violence be part of the institutional process. Research by Grossman *et. al.* (2009) explores violence in the training stage of military service as the 'inculcation of violent ideation' (page number required), further putting young people at risk of idolising the violence that can be experienced during military service. Consequently, it is not the ability refrain from desistance that drives some to join, but the desire to legitimize their propensity towards violence that drives them (Grossman, 2009). Nonetheless, the research suggests that for many, engaging in violence is an afterthought when the military provides the opportunity to escape incarceration, poverty, dangerous communities and unsuitable home lives (Bouffard, 2003).

2.5.3   Societal views on the Veteran Transition

Recent studies reveal that when the expectations of military service are not met, either through failed training periods (i.e. not passing the initial training period for selection [11]), or subsequent early and/or medical discharge, individuals are more likely to struggle in their transition to civilian life (See: Gordon, Burnell and Wilson, 2020; Griffin and Gilbert, 2015; Brewer and Herron, 2022). Research has found that individuals in these circumstances are more likely to struggle in community reintegration, employment, and family reunification (See: Keeling *et al.*, 2015; Kwan *et al.*, 2017; Creech, Hadley and Borsari, 2014). The continued dispersal of struggling veterans into society doesn't help to challenge an underlying moral panic that exists around veterans in society, where veterans can be seen as 'damaged' or 'dangerous' in society with little understanding of the population (See: Bouffard, 2013; Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019; Jakobsen, 2000).

Possibly as a consequence of the more historical literature around veteran's needs (i.e. Hakeem, 1946), there has been a continued emphasis on understanding the challenges of alcohol misuse and combat related trauma as contributors to poor civilian re-integration amongst military veterans (See: Meadows *et al.*, 2022; Thandi *et al.*, 2015; Caddick, Smith and Pheonix, 2015; Xue *et al.*, 2015). However, other aspects of experience, such as failed identities, poor enlistment experiences, and childhood adversity are also recognised as factors in explaining difficult military to civilian transitions (See: The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Moorhead, 2021; NAPO,

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[11] Training periods vary depending on a multitude of considerations include branch, officer status, and contracts.

2008). For example, the notion of the 'veteran identity' has been explored as a means to understand how veterans can be better supported during this transition (See: Dandeker *et al.*, 2006; Walker *et al.*, 2020). Although research has explored identities within the context of military service previously, the work by Dandeker *et al.* (2006) particularly highlight the relationship between a secure veteran identity and the willingness to access support when needed. Their research highlights how an individual's perception of their veteran status can be influenced by their branch of service, time served, reason for discharge and/or discharge experience. The research asserts that without a strong veteran identity, a newly transitioned veteran can be vulnerable to developing negative views of their time in the military once in the civilian environment (Dandeker *et al.*, 2006).

Conversely, being seen positively as a veteran through societal and interpersonal acceptance has been shown to spur on an individual's successful transition (Doe, 2020); it is the wider appreciation for military service and the feeling of belonging that contributes to civilian life being seen as a position transition (Doe, 2020; Verhoeven, Poorthuis and Volman, 2018). Importantly then, research has found that societal acceptance can contribute to an individual adopting the veteran identity, which ultimately can lead to positive experiences of help seeking, positive employment experiences, and positive family reunification (Dandeker *et al.*, 2006; Walker, Selous and Misca, 2020). Therefore, society has a strong role to play in the military to civilian transition.

In the same way, research has highlighted how experiencing a 'failed' military career can contribute to a lack of secure identities, social isolation and difficulties transitioning into civilian life (See: Gordon, Burnell and Wilson, 2020; Doe, 2020; Walker, 2012). Important to the context of this research, when veterans are involved with offending behaviours and become part of the social discourse of veterans being 'damaged' due to media representation, further challenges to the 'veteran identity' can arise. As a result, some veterans may be more likely to socially isolate themselves from their support groups and the wider community, as they may perceived themselves to be judge by society. This is particularly relevant to veterans who are involved in serious offences post military service as their social identities are challenged, as are their interpersonal identities (DiBennardo, 2018; Krinsky, 2016; Lancaster, 2011). In the

context of the above research, wider societal views are influential in the pathway *away* from desistance, rather than *towards* it.

2.6 Psychosocial Considerations

This section will focus on the psychosocial considerations that can influence the lives of veterans in the pre-enlistment stage, predominately explored through a sociological and psychological lens. Important because characteristics and experiences that can be present in a veteran's life history prior to military service can influence their military and post-military lives. Specifically, the literature has been presented to illustrate the following important areas: *family support, adverse childhood experiences*, and *youth vulnerabilities.*

2.6.1 Family Support

As a key function of society, the role of the family is to provide stability and structure in order to prevent behavioural challenges in times of stress. Historical research believes it is the partners, parents, siblings and extended family members that shape the behavioural intentions and actions of the individual (Parsons, 1959). However, Parsons (1959) view of the family does not necessarily reflect families in an accurate light, and some may not be coming home to the 'warm bath' he describes families as. More contemporary views of the family highlight the constricting way in which families can function, often limiting autonomy, creating conflict, and inflicting violent and dysfunctional viewpoints onto an individual (Few- Demo and Allen, 2020). Still families remain a key component to how any individual develops their sense of self and their sense of the world.

Contemporary studies reinforce that it is these social bonds, developed within the constraints of family life, which influence an individual's belief systems and worldview, thereby influencing how a person behaves and their attitudes towards the world (Flay, Snyder and Petraitis, 2009; Sameroff, 2010). In relation to military lives, Helmus *et al.* (2018) found that amongst new recruits, family was seen as a strong motivator to join the military at a young age. Their research highlights families as being both a positive and negative influence in the pathway towards military service. Further, their findings indicate that families are most influential when there are previous generations of family members that have engaged in military service supporting enlistment. Subsequently, the hearing stories of generational experiences invoked feelings of honour and prestige that

others believed they could attain should they enlist (Helmus *et al.*, 2018). The research highlights that even where family members express feelings of concern towards military service, the family involvement in the process is still viewed as a positive contributor to an individual joining, as the participants reported feelings of engagement and support (Helmus *et al.*, 2018). These findings align with similar research that highlights the impact of parental influence on an individual's propensity to join the military (i.e. Gibson, Griepentrog and March, 2007). As such, the family is the first collective in which an individual experiences the impact of institutionalisation, as the family can serve both as a supportive force for change and/or a hindrance to it.

Running in parallel to having a positive family support system, is the presence of unreliable or untrustworthy family relationships. Research by Bachman *et al.* (2000) previously explored how unstable and dangerous home environments were also a motivation to enlist in military service. Within the research, negative viewpoints of the family unit and unstable relationships were cited as influential in the decision to join as many wanted to leave before reaching adulthood. These findings do not exist in isolation and the ability to join the military as a means to seek safety is often cited in the literature (See: Murphy and Sharp, 2011; Spence, Henderson and Elder, 2013; Banks and Albertson, 2018). When Parsons' compares a person returning home after a period away to the feeling of having a 'warm bath', there is the assumption that the family is a harmonious one (Parsons, 1959). In some ways, this framework discounts the impact that dysfunctional [12] families can have on an individual, as families are more likely to serve as the primary mediator to socialisation, learning values and the stabilisation of adult personalities.

Therefore, if the individual is socialized in problematic circumstances, they may have difficulties developing secure relationships in their adult lives (Malvaso *et al.*, 2021; Weiss, 1988; Althusser, 1970). Consequently, within the scope of military service, these individuals may bring with them difficulty adjusting to group settings, abiding by authority, or engaging in routine (See: Bachman *et al.*, 2000; Spence, Henderson and Elder, 2013; Banks and Albertson, 2018). Importantly, the challenges that derive from families are rarely singular occurrences; they are dynamic and multi-

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[12] The term 'dysfunctional' is defined as disturbances in a person's thinking, emotional regulation, or behaviour that reflects significant dysfunction in psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning (Gagne-Julien, 2021)

faceted. Accordingly, where difficult home lives are explored, so are the experiences that derive from these relationships. Often these experiences can be deemed challenging or adverse (Asmussen *et al.*, 2020).

2.6.2 Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) are considered to be directly related to poor mental health outcomes, poor educational attainment social isolation, early mortality, suicide, and drug and alcohol addiction (Felitti *et al.*, 1998). Experiences such as these could include emotional and physical neglect, physical and sexual abuse, financial exploitation, poverty and homelessness (Herzog and Schmahl, 2018; Struck *et al.*, 2021). These experiences are considered 'adverse' events as the child or young person is not in control of the events or the outcomes. Research has found that it is the more 'adverse' experiences that are known to impact an individual's physical and mental health over the course of an individual's life span (Corcoran and McNulty, 2018; Herzog and Schmahl, 2018). As the military has historically recruited from areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, geographical isolation and associated social issues[13], research has found that many who have joined the military young have experienced several forms of adverse childhood experiences prior to joining the service (Blosnich *et al.*, 2014; Ross, Murphy and Amour, 2018).

Among the literature, Ross, Murphy and Amour (2018) reported that over sixty percent of the three hundred and thirty-one military veterans interviewed, reported one or more ACEs in their pre-enlistment history. Individual interviews with the veterans revealed high instances of substance abuse and high levels of family dysfunction, and these experiences were cited as contributing to difficulties transitioning into and out of the military as often the participants had limited experiences exploring the impact of their experiences and subsequently, were living with their traumas unresolved (Ross, Murphy and Amour, 2018). Similar findings were reported by Blosnich *et al.*, (2014) when exploring the relationship between ACEs and difficulty transitioning into military life. Interestingly, their research highlighted a particular propensity to engage in violent behaviour in participants who cite more than one ACE in their life history. The participants who cited instances of violent offending and/or engagement in unsanctioned violence while in the military or within their interpersonal relationships,

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[13] Refer to Chapter One for the data referring to recruitment strategies and numbers.

also cited adverse childhood experiences (Blosnich *et al.*, 2014). This research aligns with similar research with non-military populations (i.e. Pingley, 2017), that explores the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and violent offending (See: Baglivio and Epps, 2016; DeLisi and Beauregard, 2018; Kahn *et al.*, 2020).

Best practice around the treatment of adverse childhood experiences and the identification of ACE's has been contradictory in nature due to the controversy in how the categories have been developed over time (Hardt and Rutter, 2004; Mersky, Janczewski and Topitzes, 2017). Research has contested the validity of the categorisation of events, as the findings have been based on the recollection of adults reporting on their childhood experiences. Due to the time lapse between the event and the *exploration of the event*, the research has the potential to represent skewed or inaccurate data (Hardt and Rutter, 2004; Mersky, Janczewski and Topitzes, 2017). To address these concerns, research has explored recall bias in populations with a high prevalence of ACEs present in their life histories (Femina, Yeager and Lewis, 1990; Reuben *et al.*, 2016). Decades apart, both of these important studies found that adults were more likely to downplay their adverse childhood experiences, rather than exaggerate them. Furthering offering a valuable contribution to what is

The presence of adverse childhood experiences prior to joining the military may lead to a vulnerability to other challenging experiences that may present themselves in the military at key times, including early training experienced, deployment and combat (Easton, 2012). Equally, the presence of adversity can lead to higher instances of mental health problems and a higher likelihood of developing PTSD later in life (Helzer, Robins and McEvoy, 1987). While contradictions may arise within the ACE framework, fewer alternatives exist that help inform what is understood about the relationships that exists between adverse experiences, trauma related disorders and difficulties in transitional periods. Nor does an alternative framework exist that fully encompasses the wider socio-economic contributors that affect the development of trauma related disorders outside of the presence of a singular traumatic occurrence (Asmussen *et al.*, 2020; Struck *et al.*, 2021). In the context of the body of research above, the intersection between how adversity is seen, experienced and is understood is seen as central to understanding how life trajectories are influenced by experiences in childhood.

2.6.3 Vulnerabilities in Youth

The role of the military in society has long been the subject of discourse due to its conscription of young people, its role within society and the impact of military service on individuals and their families (See: Child Rights International Network, 2019; Sheilds, 2020; Segal, 1986). As a result, the Child Rights International Network (2019) produced research that highlights the impact of recruiting young people into military service due to their lower developmental age and increased vulnerabilities. The research highlights how young people willing to join military service before the age of eighteen are more likely to be fleeing difficult home lives and are more neurodevelopmentally vulnerable to stress than adult recruits (Child Rights International Network, 2019).

Research has found that significant changes in the development of children occurs between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, due to how their brains function and respond to the influence of hormonal fluctuation (Giedd, 2008). As the UK military predominantly recruits young males[14], research that explores the sex differences in psychopathology and the impact of hormonal influences on young people is important to mention (Child Rights International Network, 2019; Berenbaum and Beltz, 2016). Although limited amongst the discourse, research that aims to unpick any biological contributors to the veteran transition is noteworthy. Research has found that the impact of development, cognitive suspension and periods of developmental regression could explain why some veterans have difficulty transitioning into civilian life as they may have joined from a young developmental and biological age. Consequently, making the recruitment of these young people a public health concern as well (See: Hagopian and Barker, 2011; Child Rights International Network, 2019; Berenbaum and Beltz, 2016).

For those recruits who transition into the military in early adolescence or the 'emerging adulthood' stage, it would be unlikely that many would have the fully developed senses of self or a sense of agency that could support them in their transition into new group environments in a positive way (Child Rights International Network, 2019; Caspar *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, the research found that some individuals in this situation may be at greater risk to developing poor mental health and social isolation

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[14] Referring back to Chapter One, although the military is attempting to change its' demographic with regards to gender and diversity, the socio-economic backgrounds may remain the same. Therefore, there may be an influx of female recruits who will experience similar challenges to their male counterparts.

(Caspar *et al.*, 2020). Earlier research has highlighted that UK military personnel are twice as likely to suffer from depression and anxiety in comparison to the civilian population (Goodwin *et al.*, 2017). Further, in their study with over six hundred military personnel, Goodwin *et al.* (2017) found that vulnerabilities to drug and alcohol misuse and self-harm were present in the lives of those who reported difficult home lives in childhood. Although this research focused on the adult military population, the findings open up the debate around how vulnerable young people would report their experiences of anxiety and depression during the enlistment and training process should they be asked. Research by King's College, based on a retrospective cohort study of 78,157 veterans in Scotland, reported that soldiers who were aged sixteen to seventeen and a half at the time of enlistment were twice as likely to experience both alcohol misuse and periods of self-harm in comparison to personnel who reported joining later in life (Bergman *et al.*, 2021). These findings bring to light how detrimental military service can be to the life histories of military personnel who experience military culture too soon.

Equally, the same types of vulnerabilities could derive from the susceptible identities that exist in the youth developmental stages (Dayan *et al.*, 2010; Erikson, 1950). Therefore, individuals with experiences of adversity in childhood may also be more vulnerable to the absorption of 'unhealthy[15]' or 'dangerous' views as a means to assimilate into a culture in which they are hoping to belong (Green *et al.*, 2010). Research has found that although individuals may have experienced different forms of masculine role models that enforce overtly masculine or toxic masculinity in their pre-enlistment lives, military life differs. As such, military masculinity differs in that it emphasises physical strength, violence, and subordination, which has the potential to permeate vulnerable identities with greater consequence (Green *et al.*, 2010; Reit, 2017).

Research by Green *et al.* (2010) suggests that military culture can exacerbate pre-enlistment vulnerabilities, whereby making an individual at risk of engaging in acts of violence as a means of belonging. As such, distorted views on violence and subordination may be more easily developed as a consequence of both military

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[15] Utilisation of words such as 'healthy', 'well-adjusted', 'positive' or 'negative' have been made sparingly throughout the thesis as these terms can be subjective and therefore, not helpful to understanding the meaning assigned by the participants to these experiences. Where these terms have been used, it has been within the context of the research that utilises those terms or has been used by the participants themselves.

masculinity and poor identity development in pre-enlistment life. The historic legacy and still substantially larger representation of males within the UK military leads to masculinity being seen as a central consideration when seeking to understand the main drivers towards masculine behaviours and feelings of belonging (Richard and Molloy, 2020; Barrett, 1996). Consequently, individuals who have yet to develop a strong sense of identity pre-enlistment, may be more vulnerable to becoming indoctrinated into a culture they were emotionally and intellectually unprepared for.

From the initial enlistment stage, the indoctrination process utilised by the military increases a sense of dependency, while also demanding the burgeoning of a new identity that aligns with the collective (Goffman, 1957). For those who are still very active in their pre-enlistment life, the convergence of their military and their pre-enlistment identity can cause internal and external conflicts (Roccas and Brewer, 2002). As with many forms of institutions, there is a dependency created by the institution that can suspend the personal and cognitive development of those within (Caspar *et al.*., 2020). For recruits who were not biologically prepared or emotionally attuned to the sacrifices required in military life, a premature transition out of military life may be the ideal way forward (Sullivan and Ariss, 2020). However, unlike other employers, the option to leave the military is unlike most termination processes; walking away after submitting a resignation letter is (understandably) not possible. A formalised bureaucratic system involving the chain of command surrounding the recruit is required, followed by a breaking of their contract and at times a swift removal from housing. For some, contract periods are extended, depending on their age of enlistment, further complicating the leaving process. For those with a worldview that the military is a career first, the transition onto another career may not be difficult as their expectations were set upon signing the employment contract (Sullivan and Ariss, 2020). For those with the worldview that the military is a part of their core identity, the success of the transition can be dependent on whether or not the veteran felt their time in was purposeful and whether their veteran identity is firmly embedded within them (Burdett *et al.*, 2012).

2.7 'Corps' Transitional Challenges

This section will focus on the psychosocial considerations that can influence the lives of incarcerated veterans following their transition out of military service. This is predominately explored through a sociological and psychological lens and will

foreground literature that speaks to the characteristics and experiences that can influence a veteran's pathway towards offending behaviour. The section begins necessarily with a review of the conceptual terrain by exploring *how transitions are understood.* It then presents what is known regarding service leavers' adjusting *to veteran status,* before focussing more specifically on how *mental health* is a factor in the trajectories of UK veterans. The section concludes by reviewing key literature dedicated to understanding the impact of *PTSD* and the challenges to getting support for this population.

2.7.1   Understanding the Military to Civilian Transition

As presented below, Weaver (2019) identifies two different kinds of frameworks through which understandings of veterans' engagement in criminality from a life course perspective might be conceived, static versus dynamic theories. After a brief explanation of the view of transitions within the approach, the rationale for exploring both the static and dynamic theoretical approach will be established. *Static theories* assume that criminality is linked with characteristics or a likelihood to offend combined with the opportunity to act on criminal impulses (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1995; Blokland and Nieuwbeerta, 2005). As such, life events such as employment change, marriage, separation, military service and incarceration would not encourage the deviation from criminal activity (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1995). While the military might provide less opportunities to offend through the provision of a strict environment, the military may also provide opportunities to continue a cycle of offending (i.e. violence related offending) (Weaver, 2019). Therefore, under the static theories approach, the relationship between military service and offending behaviour is difficult to ascertain. *Dynamic theories* differ in that the lived experiences of an individual, (i.e. joining the military, leaving home, relationship breakdowns), are considered to be impactful and fundamental to transitional experiences (Weaver, 2019; Blokland and Nieuwbeerta, 2005). By definition, a transition is 'the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another' (Frantzeskaki and Haan, 2009). However, transitions can be viewed through the institutional, environmental or psychological lens. By viewing the individuals' experiences through the lens of a 'transition', important events are seen to be key factors to consider when trying to understand criminality (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Weaver, 2019). As many transitional experiences are unconscious, a propensity towards criminality could be assigned to a specific incident or

a specific period of time and the meaning that was assigned to the event, without an individual being consciously aware of its' impact (Nicholson and West, 1988; Schlossberg, 1981). Further,

While many of the transitional experiences that inform an individual's life course are experienced unconsciously, the research highlights the conscious process of recognising the emotional needs of the self while going through a transitional period as paramount to the process (Durkheim, 1915; Goffman, 1957; Hochschild, 1983; Giddens, 1991). Thus, where poor mental health literacy or a lack of social support is available to explore transitions as dynamic experiences while they are occurring, an individual may not be aware that their life is shifting in this way (Wheaton, 1990; Dunlop, 2004). Consequently, individuals may feel as though they are experiencing these shifts in isolation, which then isolates them from the support that might be available to them should they engage in help seeking behaviours.

Currently, there is an abundance of research that explores transitions as a means to understand how an individual moves from one positionality to the next (i.e. childhood to adulthood, employment to retirement, healthy to disabled, military to civilian, veteran to offender). However, there remains a gap in the research that explores the process of transitions through the eyes of an institutional setting, although the field is expanding (See: Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2020; Miller, 2017; Albertson, Irving and Best, 2015; Hareven and Masoka, 1988; Geels, 2005). However, this rich body of literature is generally discipline specific. As such, there is no determinate model for studying and reporting on transitions across several disciplines and subjects (Zolfagharian *et al.*, 2019; Jindal-Snape and Cantali, 2019).

When studying the lived experiences of veterans, the priority often shifts to exploring the experiences of veterans soon after leaving the service, without giving consideration to the multitude of transitions that occur across their life span (Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014; Wadham and Morris, 2019). Therefore, in the context of this thesis, studying the 'life course' allows for much of the nuances that exist across the life span to be explored. Schlossberg (1981) argues that in order to understand how adults respond to their environment, their lives must be explored through a transitional lens. By exploring the behaviour, relationships, and self- beliefs and assumptions of an individual, factors that influence an individual's ability to adjust to a transition are uncovered. To view the veterans' transitions in this way allows for a focus to be on the

impact of the organisation on the individual's ability to cope with the transition, while also allowing for several other categories of factors to be taken into consideration (Schlossberg, 1981).

Within the framework applied by Schlossberg (1981), a transition occurs not only when an event occurs, but when an event results in a change in assumption about the world or the self, which ultimately leads to a change in the individuals' behaviours or relationships. The process of transition can be anticipated or unexpected, occurring across three stages: (1) 'moving in', occurs when the reality of the transition is acknowledged, (2) 'moving through', occurs when new roles, assumptions, beliefs or relationships are accepted and balanced, and (3) 'moving out' occurs when an individual adjusts their life to the change and prepares for the next stage (Schlossberg, 1981). Further, other transitional models may also be appropriate in the context of military transitions (i.e. the Adaptive Military Transition Theory, the Model of Transition in Veterans (MoTiVe) (Bourdieusian theory, Selder's Life Transition Theory). However, in the context of this thesis, Schlossberg's theory allows for the myriad of challenges facing individuals to take precedence over their military identity and the impact of military institutionalisation (Mitchell and Lapita, 2010; Cooper, 2016; Anderson and Goodman, 2014).

The notion of transitions extends beyond the transition from civilian life to military life to incarceration. Where individuals enlist in military service from a young age, their developmental stages are going through transitions, as are their identities. Research by the Forces in Mind Trust (2022) explored how joining the military in the 'emerging' adulthood stage can contribute to individuals becoming more vulnerable to viewing the military as a provider of the social bonds needed to develop their identity. Subsequently, there are both internal and external pressures put on the individual that can negatively influence their physical transition into military service and their internal transition into adulthood. Further research explores the importance of understanding the transitional stages of development in young people in order to understand how they may experience the transition into military service (See: Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008; Sokol, 2009). However, as Schlossberg (1981) has found, transitional experiences are complex and it is difficult to identify which type of transition (i.e. physical, social or psychological) takes priority when aiming to understand the transition from military service to incarceration.

2.7.2 Adjusting to Veteran Status

Support for veterans has been advocated for in social justice research as a way to ensure the social and economic shifts that occur during the transition process do not negatively impact the veteran in civilian life (United Nations Social Justice Report, 2006). It was The Lord Ashcroft Review (2014), that recommend that the UK government re-examine the definition of the term 'veteran', and that the MoD re-define the criteria to specify what length and type of service the enabled the veteran title (Lord Ashcroft Review, 2014). Currently, the UK now has one of the most inclusive definitions of a veteran[16], which allows a range of individuals to have access to incentives and support from day one of service (Ministry of Defence, 2017). This type of support, in collaboration with a change in the attitudes and demographics of policy leaders, allows the veteran experience to be at the forefront of the research agenda. Nonetheless, the discourse around veteran status continues.

Consequently, what is presently known about veterans often differentiates between branch of service and also their length and type of service history. For those leaving the service outside of standard contract conditions (i.e. deterioration in physical or mental health, administrative discharge or experience with criminal and non-criminal conduct charges), the process of leaving prior to their contract ending could have damaging effects on their transition (Ministry of Defence, 2019). The acceptance of veteran status will be very impactful for those entering back into civilian life, as a formal identification allows access to further support for those who may be returning back to the socio-economically deprived areas in which they were recruited from (Child Rights International Network, 2019).

Burdett *et al.* (2013) reported the presence of an accepted veteran identity as being directly correlated with an individual's willingness to engage in help seeking following the transition into civilian life. Similarly, research has found that veterans who engage in help seeking at the appropriate time are more likely to gain access to employment, maintain positive relationships and avoid offending behaviours (See: Iversen *et al.*, 2010; Burdett *et al.*, 2013; Murphy and Busuttil, 2015). Collectively, this research highlights how important the internal framing to military service is to the

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[16] A reminder that a veteran is classed as an individual who had served for at least one day in the HM Armed Forces. This definition relates to the participant population inclusively.

military to civilian transition. For example, research has found that veterans who view their military service as beneficial to their future, a future in which they are in control of the outcome, there is a psychological resilience that can improve their likelihood of seeking help should they need it (Elbogen *et al.*, 2014; Hom *et al.*, 2020). Equally, having other veterans within their social group increases an individual's feeling of belonging which can increase their willingness to seek help should they need it. It also increases the perception that the environment is safe (Bergman *et al..*, 2021). Accordingly, for individuals who leave the military through less than honourable means, their social networks may lessen, and even more so, should they experience incarceration.

The current and changing official definitions of what constitutes a veteran has been presented earlier. It is important to recognise that the definition does not exist solely amongst policy makers. Amongst the veteran population, there is also a discourse about which military service characteristics align with the definition of the veteran (Dandeker *et al.*, 2006; Burdett *et al.*, 2012). It is clear that many veterans do not identify themselves as a veteran, which influences both research and policy based understandings about the veteran experience. Research has found that this lack of self-classification can hinder an individual's ability to define themselves internally and amongst the civilian community which they have just re-entered (Albertson, Taylor and Murray, 2019; Burdett *et al.*, 2012; Doe, 2020). Doe (2020) found that a veteran self-identification or a lack thereof, had the potential to greatly influence how an individual engaged with interpersonal relationships and employment as there was a lost sense of belonging that was a direct result of leaving the military. Collectively (See: Albertson, Taylor and Murray, 2019; Burdett *et al.*, 2012, Doe 2020; Dandeker *et al.*, 2006), these findings assert that veteran identity is an essential component to a 'successful' transition. Conversely, a lack of such an identity could hinder an individual's personal and community identity and their willingness to engage in help seeking when appropriate (Albertson, Taylor and Murray, 2019; Burdett *et al.*, 2012; Doe, 2020). Therefore, it is essential that veterans see themselves and feel seen as veterans in order to interact and engage of feelings of belonging within the veteran community.

For some veterans, the loss of their military identity can trigger a sense of rejection from the military institution. For example, Grimell (2018) has found that an individual that is part of their 'chosen' institution will benefit from the self-identities

that have developed over their life course, as the need for belonging is strengthened by the acceptance that is given to them by said institution. To be viewed as having 'institutional membership' amongst the Armed Forces is important to those who view their time in as a form of self-sacrifice with a strong sense of their military identity (Grimell, 2018). Presenting similar notions, further research (See: Albertson, Taylor and Murray, 2019; Doe, 2020) has found that it is the sense of belonging in both military life and amongst the veteran community that secures the veterans identity as they transition into civilian life. The feelings of connectivity, success and belonging are what informs not only their worldview but also their next stages of life (Albertson, Taylor and Murray, 2019; Doe, 2020).

For many veterans, the ability to be placed within the ideal worldview that they have constructed, where they are a soldier, requires certain factors to be in place in order to be seen as a veteran (Doe, 2020). Often those with difficulty identifying as a veteran have not seen combat, have not served beyond their initial contract or do not view themselves as 'old enough' to be a veteran (Doe, 2020). Beder (2012) found that should an individual not meet their personal expectations or the expectations of the military through early or dishonourable discharge, the sense of loss and divergence from with their military identity can confound their ability to self-identity as a veteran during the re-integration process. Similarly, with regard to early service leavers, there is an increased vulnerability to rejecting the veteran identity due to the way in which they are discharged (Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014; Wadham and Morris 2019). Research has found that for early service leavers in particular, the term veteran is difficult to identify with due to a lack of combat related injuries or a lack of completion of basic training (Burdett *et al.*, 2012). Because of this, early service leavers may view their time in as less valuable. Consequently, a mentality such as this could negate the original motivations to join the military and the enlistment process, which could further hinder the veteran during their transition. Ultimately, motivations for service, the enlistment experience and the brevity of military service should be taken into consideration when exploring the notion of the veteran identity.

Further research into the veteran identity has sought to explore how veterans would define their military identity, what impacts on their perception of their time in and under what circumstances would a veteran be willing to access support (Burdett *et al.*, 2013). When asked about which characteristics inform the veteran identity, Burdett

et al. (2013) found that only half of the two hundred and twenty-two veterans they had surveyed had self-identified due to a lack of alignment with the military characteristics they perceived as influential to the veteran identity (i.e. combat experience, age, service history). Their research highlights how complex the veteran identity is and how difficult it is for some to categorize and compartmentalize their experiences. The findings of Burdett *et al.* (2013) study is yet another valuable addition to an important body of research identifying how important the development and retention of the veteran identity is to an individual and their transition into civilian life (See: Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014; Wadham and Morris 2019; Burdett *et al.*, 2013).

2.7.3 Mental Health

The section begins with a brief, but stark mapping of the statistical evidence recording the extent of mental health issue amongst the military population. Following this, the chapter progresses to examine the research and knowledge of mental health pressures as it pertains to military service as well as to those who have left it. In 2010, the UK government acknowledged the urgent need for veterans to gain access to adequate mental health treatment in the 'Fighting Fit' report (Ministry of Defence, 2010). A key finding of this report found that mental health issues were the second most commonly cited reasons for medical discharges at that time (Ministry of Defence, 2010). As poor mental health was reported to affect nearly 1 in 6 of adults in the UK prior to the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, veterans report mental health issues at a similar rate to the civilian population (Ministry of Defence, 2021). Since 2010, there have been several shifts in military operations leading to changes in deployment opportunities, an increase in redundancies and changes to recruitment practices that impacts the mental health of armed forces personnel and newly transitioned veterans (Ministry of Defence, 2020).

Consequently, 1 in 8 military personnel were reported to be accessing mental health treatment from 2019-2020 for issues relating to employment, family breakdowns, and alcohol misuse with priority. The reported figures have been found to be slightly comparable against the civilian population (Ministry of Defence, 2021). Although females are significantly underrepresented in the military, of those seeking mental health support, personnel across all age ranges were represented with females seeking out treatment at higher rates than male service personnel (Ministry of Defence, 2021).

For female veterans, the relationship between having a PTSD[17] diagnosis and their time in, is associated with experiences of military sexual trauma rather than from deployment, which is another form of institutional abuse often underrepresented in the literature (Morris, Albanesi and Cassidy, 2019; McKenzie, 2008). Further, when comparing the enlistment statistics available around gender and utilisation of MoD resources, it becomes apparent that there may be a number of male military service members who are not accessing the appropriate level of support with regard to mental health.

Clinicians working with the veteran population have noted that individuals who were previously well- adjusted, with no prior life histories of mental health challenges, are equally susceptible to the psychological difficulties that can arise from traumatic life events (Iversen *et al.,* 2007). Within the context of military culture, the onset of poor mental health for military personnel could be a consequence of instances of bullying, social exclusion or periods of social isolation while in service (Morris, Albanesi and Cassidy, 2019; McKenzie 2008). Research suggests that individuals who have been subjected to bullying or instances of abuse have a higher rate of mental health conditions than those who have been deployed and would theoretically be more at risk to mental health problems (Morris, Albanesi and Cassidy, 2019; McKenzie 2008). These experiences can lead to period of social isolation and group exclusion. Importantly, the loss of individual agency within the military setting has been found to be impactful to the mental health of veterans. It is the ongoing training requirements, the social isolation and the dependency on the military that wears down the individual rather than one specific form of trauma in many cases (Molendijk, Kraner and Verweij 2015, Wadham and Morris 2019). Consequently, military culture in itself could be considered as an adverse experience, especially for those who join the service at a young age.

Although potentially robust enough at the time of joining the service, the research has found that all service personnel have a 'breaking point' which can contribute to poor mental health in the veteran population (See: Brewin, Andrew and Valentine, 2000; Ozer *et al.*, 2003; Iversen *et al.*, 2007). However, throughout the

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[17] Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is defined as Intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s). (APA, 2013)

literature, a lack of consistent viewpoints remains. Therefore, it is problematic to try to identify if these 'breaking points' are impacted by pre-enlistment experiences of trauma or adversity or if it is in fact combat and military life that causes poor mental health in some of the veteran population (Deahl, Klein and Alexander, 2011). Further, the research has found that the environment experienced during the recovery period after trauma exposure may act as a protective factor. For example, social support from families and friends is associated with lower PTSD[18] risk in the general population (Brewin, Andrew and Valentine, 2000; Ozer *et al.*, 2003). This can also be said of the military population as there is the increased benefit of having families on base[19], a group social support system and support from the institution (Deahl, Klein and Alexander, 2011). Therefore, it is important to consider how the vulnerabilities to develop poor mental health and trauma related disorders are very much individualistic in nature as not every individual who experiences trauma goes on to develop disorders such as PTSD.

Due to the relatively low rates of PTSD and C-PTSD[20] reported in the veteran population (>10%), further research that explores how other mental health challenges impact the veteran and their families over prolonged periods of time is warranted (Lord Ashcroft Veterans Transition Review, 2014; KCMHR, 2014). Longitudinal research has sought out to improve what is understood about the increase in mental health problems for veterans over prolonged periods of time. While not inclusive of the whole veteran population, research has found that difficulties with poor mental health have been reportedly due to an overall poor response to adjustment and poor responses to stress, rather than time in service or the presence of PTSD (Cooper *et al.*, 2018).

Although the experiences of veterans who have served under less traumatic conditions are more often underrepresented in the literature, there is a body of research that explores how chronic and cumulative stress can contribute to more serious mental health challenges over time for the military population (Mcfarlane, 2010). For example, cultural stress, or feeling challenged regarding ethical dimensions of their past and

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[18] See next page sixty three for in-depth literature on this topic.

[19] To note, the provision of housing by the MoD is tenuous due to the ways in which the military is changing in the UK

[20] C-PTSD is explored further in the following section. However, C-PTSD further defined in the ICD-11 as consisting of the same criteria as PTSD, with three additional groups of symptoms required to meet the criteria for diagnosis (Herman, 1992).

anticipatory stress were found to be significantly impactful for those readjusting to civilian life (Mcfarlane, 2010). Further, the stress associated with having to engage in multinational military operations was also noted as impactful for those transitioning. This research could be of particular importance to those who served in Northern Ireland as many veterans report feeling as though their time in Northern Ireland was experienced with particular difficulties due to cultural and religious segregation which is not present in other areas in the UK.

Understanding the experiences of the veterans immediately after civilian integration and across their life course is important as mental health has been cited as a contributing factor to early discharge, poor employment, engaging in offending behaviour, family breakdowns and self-harm (Cooper *et al.*, 2018; MacManus and Wessely, 2013). As such, there is a need to consider how veterans are affected by mental health challenges outside of the more commonly cited PTSD narrative, as symptoms relating to anxiety and depression are reported with higher prevalence against those reporting PTSD symptoms (Inoue *et al.*, 2022; Iversen *et al.*, 2005). Identity, loss of relationships, a lack of coping strategies and the inability to mentally adjust to civilian life are equally important challenges that influence the mental health of veterans (Inoue *et al.*, 2022). Importantly, as armed forces personnel often recount lived experiences of trauma and often hear recollections of trauma from their cohort, the onset of symptoms related to vicarious or secondary trauma should be considered as potentially harmful to an individual.

Theoretically, vicarious or secondary trauma has been considered to be a diagnosis reserved for professionals experiencing trauma related symptoms after hearing numerous disclosures of violent acts from their clients (McCann and Pearlman, 1990). In the context of military culture, there is often a reiteration of times of combat, loss of life and violence, which could put some of the veterans into 'caring' roles instead of being seen as colleagues. If a veteran were to be raised in a military household prior to joining the service, they could be doubly impacted by these re-iterations (Blaisure *et al.*, 2016). A constant reiteration of trauma experiences could lead to the veteran experiencing symptoms related to trauma disorders without actually having seen combat or experience a trauma of their own, which could ultimately affect the help seeking behaviours of the veteran as they do not view their symptoms as 'worthy' (McCann and Pearlman, 1990; Castro-Vale *et al.*, 2019).

2.7.4 PTSD and the Complexities of Poor Mental Health

Trauma has been described as an event existing "outside the range of usual human experience" (APA, 2013, p. 236). Alongside the psychological definition, 'trauma' has been described as 'transient situational disturbances' that exist outside of a psychological condition (Herman, 1992; Cloitre *et al.*, 2013; Pietrzak and Cook, 2013). Subsequently, the experience of trauma is situation and objective and therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how an individual would respond in comparison to another should they experience the same life event (Herman, 1992; Cloitre *et al.*, 2013; Pietrzak and Cook, 2013). Recently, the discourse around trauma has been extended to include the classification of 'complex trauma', defined as being continuous events that contribute to a lack of psychological wellbeing. As such, this definition suggests that impactful interpersonal traumas may begin early in life contributing to compounded vulnerabilities that may influence an individual over the course of their entire lives (Herman, 1992; Cloitre *et al.*, 2013; Pietrzak and Cook, 2013).

Research has found that those with trauma related disorders are likely to present with severe disturbances in emotional regulation and self-organisation (i.e. poor anger management, impulsivity, the inability to engage in group-cohesiveness), as well as the more commonly known symptoms related to PTSD, such as sleeplessness and the occurrence of flashbacks (Cloitre *et al.*, 2005; Wamser- Nanney and Vandenberg, 2013; Dvir *et al.*, 2014). Disorders such as PTSD and C-PTSD are particularly relevant for military personnel, who may have enlisted to escape difficult home situations where experiences of trauma were present in their early childhood environments (Sharp *et al.*, 2015; Buckman *et al.*, 2013). For these individuals, the likelihood of developing a trauma related disorder is predicated by several pre-trauma vulnerability factors including the experience of childhood adversity, family psychiatric history, low education, gender and age (Brewin, Andrews and Valentine, 2000b).[21]

While depression and PTSD symptoms were the most common reasons for military personnel to seek treatment in the UK military from 2019-2020, PTSD often exists in parallel with other disorders. These disorders (i.e. anxiety, depression and alcohol misuse) can equally impact on the veterans' life, which makes the diagnostic

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[21] Important in the context of this research, cultural risk factors such as shame and masculinity are explored throughout the thesis. However, the focus here remains on mental health to highlight the challenges that some veterans may face when accessing treatment for mental health difficulties.

process more difficult in some instances (MoD, 2020; Brewin, Garnett and Andrews, 2011). Although more historical statistical data around the prevalence of PTSD in the UK armed forces population is unavailable due to the way in which diagnostic processes and data collection and retention have varied across branches. Therefore, the current landscape is unclear. However, in 2020, the rate of PTSD diagnoses has been reported to remain low with 2 in every 1,000 active military personnel being diagnosed with the disorder in 2019-2020 (Ministry of Defence, 2021). Although relatively low in diagnostic numbers, PTSD diagnosis and treatment remains high on the priority list for policy makers, researchers and clinicians. Diagnostic criteria for PTSD outlines five categories of symptoms that need to be present in order to be diagnosed with the disorder. While not inclusive of the full range of symptoms or presentations, an individual seeking out an PTSD diagnosis would need to report the following: the experiencing or witness of a traumatic event, continuously replaying aspects of the traumatic event (rumination), avoidance, alterations of mood and physiological arousal and reactivity (DSM–5; 5th ed., American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While the DSM-5, is widely regarded as the tool used to diagnose PTSD, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the World Health Organization (2018) is also used to diagnose PTSD in the UK. Importantly, the ICD (2018) differs in its' identification slightly and prioritises three categories with fewer core symptoms represented in each category. These include rumination, avoidance, and hyper arousal (ICD-11, 2018).

Neither diagnostic tool is without criticism. Due to the limited definitions in the ICD for some disorders, criticism remains around the flexibility of the ICD criteria due to cultural variations in presentation and the reliance on clinical judgement over strict criteria (Kuester *et al*., 2017). Equally, the DSM-5 has been criticised to be lacking in reliability, be guided by cultural bias and to have a reliance on pharmaceutical companies and medical practitioners which is not in the best interest of patient care (Aboraya *et al.*, 2006). Additional criticism lies in the ways in which the DSM has evolved its definition of PTSD, moving from s an anxiety disorder, (focusing on symptomology, rather than the relationship between experiences and symptoms) to recently recognising PTSD as a distinct classification under 'Trauma and stressor-related disorders'. This change recognised that while symptoms such as avoidance, hyper-arousal or vigilance and the rumination of experiences or thoughts overlap with anxiety disorders, there are separate entities to PTSD that contribute to the severity of the disorder (DSM–5; 5th ed., American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Subsequently,

PTSD symptoms were presented alongside depressive symptoms such as sleeplessness, nightmares, flashbacks, and emotional numbness, rather than one or the other (Friedman *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the symptomology remains an important consideration in the diagnostic process.

However, the focus on symptomology is not always appropriate when seeking to understand trauma related disorder. Research by Friedman *et al.* (2011) highlighted how the shift from symptomology to causation (i.e. early childhood trauma or combat related trauma) has contributed to what is known about PTSD as practitioners are now able to classify and treat PTSD in a more informed manner (Friedman *et al.*, 2011). Their research suggest that the diagnostic label of PTSD is regarded as a means to provide psychological support through classification. Nonetheless, by its' very nature, the symptomology of the disorder is affected by the context and environment from which it is derived and cannot solely be assigned to a specific experience (Friedman *et al.*, 2011). Whilst not everyone who experiences a traumatic event will go onto develop PTSD, research has found that environment, severity of exposure and the continuous nature of the exposure to trauma can lead to PTSD (Brewin, Andrews and Valentine, 2000). Within the context of military service, the perceived threat to life, chronic anticipatory stress and the lack of predictability in a chronically changing environment can influence an individual's vulnerability to PTSD (McFarlane, 2010; Ehlers and Clark, 2000).

Exploring PTSD further, Complex PTSD (cPTSD or C-PTSD) is also common amongst populations with vulnerabilities to trauma related disorders (i.e. individuals who come from challenging backgrounds), which increase their likelihood to develop a form of PTSD (Herman, 1992; Brewin *et al.*, 2017; Cloitre *et al.*, 2013). The diagnoses differ in that Complex PTSD is linked with having more complex disturbances, which can occur across different settings and do not require a specific trigger to cause distress. Those with cPTSD experience intrusive thoughts, avoidance, hyperarousal, as well as difficulties in self-organisation, emotional regulation and poor interpersonal functioning (Maercker *et al.*, 2013; Brewin *et al.*, 2017). Although the DSM-5 has historically shied away from fully recognising the impact and importance of cPTSD, the recurrence of traumas over an extended period of time is likely to occur for those who enter into the military from difficult backgrounds (Maercker *et al.*, 2013; Brewin *et al.*, 2017). Research by Brewin, Garnett and Andrews (2011) identified that veterans who reported

having PTSD, also reported periods of addiction, depression and interpersonal challenges that derived from adversity in childhood (Brewin, Garnett and Andrews, 2011). Therefore, given the population of the military, there is a potentially larger propensity to develop a trauma relate disorder, such as PTSD or C-PTSD while in military service and beyond.

A more recent critical narrative around PTSD considers the reasons why individuals may be more inclined to seek out a PTSD diagnosis. For individuals presenting with PTSD symptoms, there are larger financial gains and benefits to be had, as well as the opportunity to receive treatment without the stigma associated with 'non-military' related mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression (Matto, McNiel and Binder, 2019). Interestingly, there are calls to consider how the relationship with charities and mental health organisations engage in the diagnosis of trauma related disorders. Accordingly, some researchers have questioned whether there is a dependent relationship that exists between the veteran and the providers of care, hindering what is known about the prevalence of PTSD amongst the veteran population (Herman and Yarwood, 2014). As such, Herman and Yarwood (2014) explore the commonness of clinicians who present an 'overly present willingness' to diagnose any armed forces personnel with deployment experience as having a 'trauma' related disorder without consideration for other alternatives. Findings by the Ministry of Defence (2021) suggest that while PTSD is of considerable concern for the veteran population, there may still be an inaccurate understanding around how common PTSD is amongst the veteran population.

2.7.5 Family Considerations

Prior to 2019, the MoD defined a 'family' as two married individuals (or those in a civil partnership) with possible children dependents (Ministry of Defence, 2019; Ministry of Defence, 2022). While veterans often refer to family as marital partners, unmarried partners, children and in some cases separated/estranged families, parents, siblings and close friends are not often regarded as family in the eyes of veterans nor the organisations created to support them (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019). More recently, as a means to better inform what is understood about military families and the notion of family in relation to military service, research has advocated for the term to be broadened in order to best anticipate the support needs of veterans (FiMT, 2014). As a response to these calls to action, in 2022, the UK Armed Forces

Family Strategy 2022-32 cited recognition for the terminology around military families to be broadened to be more inclusive to the needs of the changing work force (The Ministry of Defence, 2022). However, this call to action priorities addressing the needs of personnel who are actively engaged in their military lives, rather than veterans. This is particularly true for veterans who are involved with the criminal justice system as there is a noticeable gap, in both the provision of support to incarcerated veterans, and in the literature that explores their needs.

Historically, prior to families being considered an integral part of the military community, the families of service personnel were regarded as 'campers' who followed the service member from base to base for prestige, rather than out of obligation (Cardoza, 2010). It is only recently that military families have been viewed as an essential mediator in the veterans' successful transition (Cardoza, 2010; Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019; Iversen *et al*., 2005), although the way in which the military relies on the veteran family remains the same as it did during their service - as a transactional arrangement. As such, the military offers resources such as housing in exchange for the family providing support to the service member. The intention on behalf of the military is to mitigate the challenging conditions they supply to the service personnel with convenient access to a support system.

Retaining long held views, it seems the military continues to encourage families to operate in a more traditional manner through the service member acting as the primary provider, with the spouse engaging with childcare and family responsibilities so the service member could prioritise their role in the field (Southwell and Wadsworth, 2016). The benefit of doing this is that the family will provide a place for the service member to be supported, so that the military can operate with less concern for their service personnel (Parsons, 1951; Southwell and Wadsworth, 2016). However, this also means that the family becomes reliant on the military in a similar way to the service member, by engaging in the transactional requirement that families be together and available to the needs of the veteran *in exchange for* benefits and resources at the behest of the military (Segal, 1986). However, despite the importance placed on the family by the military, the needs of the family are often underestimated by the military, including/especially during transition periods.

Research has found that families are considerably impacted during the military to civilian transition, as family members are usually burdened with addressing the needs

of the veteran at a higher frequency (Murphy and Harden, 2018). Research that explores military family dynamics have shown that families can be positive mediators in accessing support should they not be vulnerable themselves (See: Morris, Albanesi and Cassidy, 2019; Mellotte *et al.*, 2017). Further, a willingness to seek help has been noted as dependent on the dynamics of the family unit during the transition process (Turgoose, Ashwick and Murphy, 2018; Aguirre Velasco *et al.*, 2020; Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen, 2010). However, many families experience transitional difficulties themselves and the military appears to overlook the realities for veterans and their families when this assumed stable family unit is not fully intact. Consequently, support for veterans can be inadequate when they do not have a family to return to in civilian life or if the family, they return to upon re-integration was and/or remains dysfunctional (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019).

Further, research by the Royal British Legion and HM Government (2019) found that one aspect of a poor transition into civilian life is the absence of a strong and secure support system, whether that be through family, friends or community. Further, once out of the transactional relationship that exists between military personnel and the military, a veteran becomes vulnerable to experiencing difficulties in the home and in the community. Potentially this might be as a consequence of the veteran becoming overly reliant on the military during their time in service and lacking the psychosocial skills needed to succeed in civilian life (Segal, 1986; Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019). For young families or those coping with deployment challenges, the expectations, or norms bestowed onto military families can put them in vulnerable positions when transitioning into civilian life as there is an expectation placed by the military to retain a sense of decorum and independence, even during difficult periods (Ware, 2012).

Equally, for families who were reliant on the military for the provision of housing, employment, and welfare support, it is recognised in the literature that there is a loss also for the family as well as the veteran, when they leave (Ursano *et al*., 2014; Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019). Often these challenges become compounded, resulting in the breakdown of families and the veterans' support systems. Research by Shepherd, Kay and Gray (2019) have found that expectation of the military for families of service personnel to be resilient, self-reliant and to avoid help seeking unless absolutely necessary results in a perfect storm for veterans and their families.

Further, the research highlights how the unrealistic expectations set by the military with regard to the provision of support by families once more neglects the possibility that the veterans' family are not functioning and are supportive of the civilian transition (Ursano *et al.*, 2014; Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019). These expectations could be significantly impactful for recent recruits who leave the military with new partners and children, who are younger in age and/or do not have a secure home life to return to (Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019).

The assumption the military makes when assuming families are reliable, does not consider the impact that the military has on families when the military has functioned as the primary social system for the veteran (Palmer, 2008). Research highlights how a recruit is taught to establish trusting relationships within the military which facilitates the military being seen as a primary source of support and comradery, often allowing previously established civilian relationships to dissipate (Rodriguez, 2018). Often the military 'family' is viewed as part of the wider social system that encapsulates the military subculture, rejecting the importance of the civilian family, focusing on what the military provides (Rodriguez, 2018). Unfortunately, when the military acts as though it is the primary institution from which the service member must operate, the risk of isolating the service member from their civilian family increases. This isolation can contribute to the process of returning home difficult as there may not be a traditional family to return home to or those relationships may be fragmented, further isolating the veteran (Rodriguez, 2018; Goffman, 1957).

2.8   In Service and Post- Service Challenges

This section will focus on the experiences and vulnerabilities that veterans face, potentially increasing their propensity to engage in offending behaviour both during and following military service. Explored through an interdisciplinary lens, the literature in this section begins with that which explains the actions and implications of those who continue *offending whilst in*, those who had desisted at some point and then *return to crime*, before examining a range of *barriers to desistance* amongst this group. The section concludes by reviewing what is known about *the intersections of trauma, mental health and serious offending* in this population.

2.8.1 Offending While In

The literature presents conflicting views on how the military should treat those who experience difficulties whilst in and whether the military itself 'creates' offenders (Siminski, Ville and Paull, 2016; Bouffard, 2003). For personnel who are struggling with military life and are subsequently involved in offending while in military service, the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) provides the opportunity for some to remain in service after leaving the detention facility, while others are detained in the MCTC while awaiting the outcome of an investigation, HM prison transfer, or a youth offender institution placement (MoD, 2021). The MCTC detains individuals from all branches and can house up to three hundred and twenty-three male and female detainees.

Although the present numbers report a significantly lower number of detainees than the facility holds, (or compared to when, if that was the point?) In 2020, the Independent Monitoring Board report MoD (2021) reported forty personnel being detained for various offences. In total, four hundred and sixty-nine offences were recorded against the total number of admissions to the MCTC during 2019-2020. Of these, 30% of were due to periods of going AWOL[22]. Following this, one hundred and four cases of violence, seventy cases of disobedience, twenty seven cases of sexual offending and nineteen case of drug cases were cited (Independent Monitoring Board Annual Report and MoD, 2021). In addition to this, nineteen personnel were re-admitted to the MCTC on their second detainment and four were admitted on their third detainment during 2020 (Independent Monitoring Board Annual Report and MoD, 2021). These numbers would suggest that veterans in fact become more vulnerable to offending once in the community, rather than during their military careers. Importantly, the statistics around how many individuals who were discharged due to offending but did not reach the threshold for detention are not available. Nor are the statistics around how many personnel are routed towards mental health facilities rather than the MTC as a result of offences committed. Consequently, much of what is understand about offending while in military service remains inaccessible.

Research by Brooke and Gau (2018) explored the relationship between offending behaviours and the age of enlistment, length of service, combat exposure, branch status

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[22] AWOL is defined as being 'absent without leave' amongst Armed Forces personnel.

and the type of discharge for the veteran population. Their research included 14,499 inmates incarcerated in the US, interviewed through computer assisted interviews, lasting one hour each. The interviews focused on several variables (i.e. criminal history, current offense and sentence, personal characteristics, family background, health and mental health history, prior drug and alcohol use, and prison activities), which spoke to the individuals lived experiences. The findings suggest that there remain conflicting results as to how influential military service is to the offending pathway. Nonetheless, the results did highlight that amongst the participant population, military experience was related to lower instances of arrests over the participants' lifetime. A consistent narrative amongst the research highlights a lack of understanding around the direct correlation between military service and offending behaviour. However, there exists a discourse that suggest that the main driver in offending behaviours lies in the veterans' pre-enlistment life. As such, there are several areas to consider outside of military service (i.e. homelessness, addiction, trauma, socialisation, identity and physical, sexual, and domestic violence), which often intersect but are rarely explored collectively in the literature (See: MacKenzie and Farrington, 2015; Murray *et al.*, 2023; Brewer and Herron, 2022; Inoue *et al.*, 2022).

2.8.2   Returning to Crime

Within the context of this thesis, recidivism can be understood as the act of returning to crime after a period of desistance that was not part of a formal intervention or sanction enforced by the criminal justice system (Weisberg, 2018). As such, the act of enlistment into military service, although cited in the literature as a potential 'intervention' towards desistance, is not considered in this way, an intervention (Cavanaugh, 2010; Seamone, 2011). Research has found that for individuals who engage in youth offending prior to military service, there is a vulnerability to returning to those behaviours if the re-integration process involves returning home to challenging environments (Blonigen *et al.*, 2018). Presently, the number of military personnel who were involved in offending behaviours prior to military service are unknown as these statistics are not taken at intake. Equally, the recruitment policies around enlisting individuals with a criminal background has changed, allowing some individuals to enlist depending on the circumstances of their offences. This change may influence what is known about this specific population in the future (MoD, 2020). Due to the way in

which the military recruits from disadvantaged backgrounds, it could be suggested that there may be a higher prevalence of youth offending amongst its' personnel.

Research by Blonigen *et al.* (2018) found that while there was limited research on the recidivism rates of justice involved veterans, the risks to offending identified amongst the civilian population vary in comparison to the veteran population. They found that employment was not a primary risk identified amongst the veteran literature, whereas employment is a primary risk for the civilian population (Ministry of Justice, 2013). The research identified four primary risk factors for justice involved veterans to engage in recidivism: *history of antisocial behaviour, antisocial personality pattern, antisocial cognitions, antisocial associates* (Blonigen *et al.*., 2018). Where individuals are more likely to experience vulnerabilities to these risk factors (i.e. come from challenging backgrounds, enlist at a young age, were limited in their geographical education and employment opportunities or were engage in antisocial behaviour prior to enlistment), there is an increased risk to their vulnerability to offending (Blonigen *et al.*, 2018).

Additional research that explores the relationship between youth offending, military service and a return to offending behaviours is often encompassed within research that explores wider veteran issues. Therefore, the direct relationship between youth offending, military service and recidivism is often lacking in the literature. Notably, the literature that does specifically look at these intersections is often contradictory. Consequently, there is research that has found a direct link between youth offending, military service and recidivism, that runs in parallel to research that retains the view that military service slows or stops the process of offending. (See: Hjalmarsson and Lindquist, 2019; Wang and Flores-Lagunes, 2022; Mackenzie and Farrington, 2015).

2.8.3 Barriers to Desistance: Structural Considerations

Research has found that barriers to employment, housing and social opportunities, can influence an individual's willingness to desist from crime (Treadwell, 2010). This can be said of those leaving civilian prisons and military correction centres (Howard League, 2011). Employment support is the most commonly cited type of support available to veterans entering into the civilian workforce (See: Collins *et al.*, 2016; Keeling, Kintzle and Castro, 2018). Although more recently, the support available

around housing, developing financial skills and strengthening community bonds has increased. However, the country in which the veteran is based, their length of service, and their branch of service impacts the type of service they can receive around these areas of need (Ministry of Defence, 2019). Currently, upon leaving the service, service leavers are provided with a seventy-one page document that provides information and resources around a range of topics (MoD, 2020). Criticisms of this document include an overall lack of financial management, housing and employment transition information. Equally, the document places a large reliance on language that supersedes the average literacy rate of the UK Armed Forces (The Ministry of Defence, 2020). Consequently, some veterans may struggle in accessing the information needed to support a 'positive' transition into civilian life.

In addition to difficulties accessing help seeking materials, research has found that a lack of experience planning for structured housing and the ability to manage finances have been cited as challenges that veterans during the immediate transition into civilian life and for some time after (Buchman *et al.*, 2013; Murphy and Busuttil, 2014). Therefore, veterans are more likely to experience homelessness, informal housing situations and unsafe living environments. In 2020, two hundred and forty five veterans were reported as homeless in Scotland, with numbers across the wider UK unknown (Ministry of Defence and Veterans UK, 2020). The lack of comprehensive data on the issue of veterans' homelessness could be attributed to the MoD not presently or historically collecting this information in full (Ministry of Defence and Veterans UK, 2020). However, the Royal British Legion has approximated the number of veterans to experience homelessness to be between three and six percent of the total homeless population (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019).

Further, research by the Royal British Legion in collaboration with the UK Government (2019) has cited age, drug and alcohol related problems and the presence of PTSD related symptoms as contributing to homelessness. In addition to this, the presence of PTSD symptoms when related to combat, along with military drinking culture and pre-enlistment vulnerabilities have been found to contribute to the risk of homelessness for the veteran population (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019; Iversen *et al.*, 2005). However, historic research has found that there is a lack of evidence to fully support the argument that military culture has a direct correlation with homelessness (Iversen *et al.*, 2005). More recently the research has also highlighted

inconsistent data around the relationship between the length of time between the veteran reporting the homelessness and when they left the service, which challenges the notion that it is the military itself that contributes to a person becoming homeless (Royal British Legion and HM Government, 2019). Notably, Khan (2010) reported contradictory findings citing the impact of institution indoctrination as a mitigating factor in the unwillingness to engage in help seeking when faced with homelessness. Their primary findings highlighted loss of belonging, social isolation and feelings of vulnerability around help seeking as contributing to a reluctance to engage with housing support following the civilian transition (Khan, 2010). Therefore, it can be suggested that an institutional reliance on the military can contributed to homelessness, which can contribute towards a pathway towards offending.

Following the transition out of military service, social relationships have been cited as a positive contributor to desistance for veteran offenders. Accordingly, individuals who experience social isolation, stigma or community disenfranchisement due to the types of their offences may struggle to identify positive motivations to desist (Weaver, 2019; Alberston, Taylor and Murray, 2019). Weaver (2019) explores the influence of co-offending peer groups and the role these groups play in crime and desistance. Further finding that the presence of social opportunities can take priority over the 'quality' relationships. As a result, some individuals may be more likely to seek out unstable relationships as a means to belong, rather than form long term secure relationships. Importantly, when an individual has a conscious aim towards desistance, the priorities shift and the individuals' needs and values are placed at the forefront of their motivation for desistance, putting aside the need for social or group acceptance (Weaver, 2019). As the area of research into desistance is growing, there is further opportunity to explore interpersonal relationships, social groups and identity reconciliation as ways to support desistance for the veteran population as previous research prioritises these areas for future consideration (See: Burton *et al.,* 1998; Hazel, 2017).

2.8.4 Barriers to desistance: Views towards Help Seeking

There is a substantial body of research that explores barriers to help seeking for the veteran population (i.e. a lack of awareness, low self-worth, avoidance, emotional numbing, fear, religion, avoiding a medical record of mental health problems and social exclusions), of which there remains a lack of clarity about which barriers should be

addressed first when supporting a veteran transitioning into civilian life (See: Iversen *et al.*, 2011; Cooper *et al.*, 2018; Stevenlink *et al.*, 2019; Ministry of Defence and Veterans UK, 2020;). Focusing on justice involved veterans, the research highlights an unwillingness to engage in help seeking due to shame around their offences or an embarrassment to admit there are gaps in their knowledge about housing, mental health and social engagement (Hellström and Beckamn, 2021). Additional research has noted social stigma and personal stigma as equal mediators in whether an individual feels shame in accessing support both during and after military service (See: Mellotte *et al.*, 2019; Sharpe, 2015; MacManus and Wessley, 2013). Consequently, when a veteran leaves the military with little social support, a veteran can be left feeling helpless and uncertain about how to engage with social support, including mental health support (Burdett *et al.*, 2013; Nash *et al.*, 2011). Further, potentially as a consequence of military culture, the unwillingness to appear as weak or unable to cope is a large contributor to when an individual is willing to start the help seeking process, with many waiting until tipping point to engage (Mellotte *et al.*, 2017; Sharpe, 2015).

Hellström and Beckman (2021) found that much of the research that addresses barriers to help seeking does not address the relationship that exist between overtly masculine identities and delayed help seeking. By exploring the lived experiences of young people and their views on mental health, noted contributors to a delay in help seeking were cited as wanting to appear strong and capable in the eyes of male role models (Hellström and Beckman; 2021). Where a veteran has joined the military from a young age, there is the potential to view help seeking in a negative light due to their wanting to be seen as an accepted and worthy contributor to the collective. While the context of this research focuses on the male experience, the desire to belong to the culture to one which enlisted extends beyond gendered considerations. However, research has shown that masculine and 'pro-male' characteristics specifically act as mediators in a willingness to seek help (Wade *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, the perceived 'femininity' of help seeking language could be considered a barrier to help seeking when considering the masculine prototype that is represented within military culture around self-reliance especially (Wade *et al.*, 2015; Wendt and Shafer, 2016).

Further, research that explores masculine viewpoints as contributing to poor help seeking highlight the way in which some veterans are willing to sacrifice their wellbeing in order to maintain their military identity, male relationships and standing

within the group environment (See: Bird, 1996; McKenzie *et al.*, 2018; Cleary, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 1995). Important within the context of this research, research has found that where a veterans worldview is influenced by group members with perceived strong masculine identities that are similar in age range and gender, fewer opportunities to engage in discussions about support needs are reported (McKenzie *et al.*, 2018; Wade *et al.*, 2015; Wendt and Shafer, 2016). These group dynamics can impact the self-perception of an individual to such an extent that they would choose to continue to stay as part of the collective and seen as 'worthy' rather than risk seeking support or being seen as 'other' (Wadham and Morris 2019).

As well as contributing to a delay in help seeking, research has found that overtly masculine viewpoints can contribute to instance of serious offending, including sexual offending. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) highlighted the inability to shift masculine identities as a potential contributor to sexual offending specifically. The research suggests that the loss of the masculine identity once had in the military may contribute to offenders seeking out ways in which they can 'regain' their masculinity once in civilian life. As such, sexual offending is viewed as having fewer consequences than engaging in help seeking and subsequently appearing 'weak' to their peers or family members (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In the context of this research, views on help seeking were influential to the prevalence of sexual offending that was reported.

2.8.5   Barriers to desistance: Young Identities

The notion of age being a factor in the likelihood of a veteran offending is relevant to consider against the backdrop of the average age of recruitment in the UK. However, it is not simply the physical age of the justice involved veteran that should be considered, as their physical age may not reflect their actual stage of development. Due to a lack of financial accountability, a lack of individual autonomy and a formation of dependency on the military, it has been argued that service personnel are likely to experience a period of 'arrested development' during their time in service (Louise, Hunter and Zlotowitz, 2016). Consequently, common transitional experiences can be more difficult to manage as the veteran may lack in life experiences that are common in civilian life, including the ability to plan for living off base (Louise, Hunter and Zlotowitz, 2016). The 'age curve' theory argues that the majority of individuals, regardless of their circumstances and backgrounds, will engage with criminal activity at

a lower rate as they age, with maturity being a significant factor in this determination (Weaver, 2019). Further, research that explores age as a factor in offending also cites instances of pre-enlistment offending as a factor to consider when seeking to understand veteran offending (see: MacManus *et al.*, 2015; Short *et al.*, 2018; Banks and Albertson, 2018; Van Shellen, Apel and Nieuwbeerta, 2012). As the military recruits from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, pre-enlistment offending may be present as a means of survival a response in particularly adverse structural and situational contexts' rather than a propensity towards violence (Mok *et al.*, 2018; Rokven *et al.*, 2016; Skrzypiec, 2013). This would be particularly relevant to those who experienced food poverty, malnutrition and violence prior to joining the military as these experiences may have contributed to antisocial behaviours as a means of 'survival' rather than a propensity to engage in criminality (Mok *et al.*, 2018; Booth and Pollard, 2020). Importantly, as age was noted as influential in the development of a strong veteran identity, age should also be considered influential in the context of help seeking (Dandeker *et al.* 2006; Burdett *et al.*, 2013).

2.8.6   The Intersection of Trauma, Mental Health and Serious Offending

Research that explores the shift from victim to perpetrator highlights how adult crime is often a consequence of social learning, adversity in childhood, and experiences of sexual and physical abuse (See: Felson and Lane, 2009; Glasser *et al*., 2002). The notion that adult crime is influenced by social learning is interesting when the average recruit has not reached adulthood and therefore, could be considered at a greater risk to considering the acts of violence that are taught in the military as 'normal'.

Previously, research prioritised trying to explain the frequency of violent offences amongst the veteran population, as these offence types were and continue to be the most prevalent amongst the veteran prison populations (MacManus *et al*., 2013; Howard League, 2011). There is research that suggests that the training phase of military services acts as an 'inculcation of violent ideation' in which violence is normalized and often idealized as contributing to these types of offences (Grossman, 2009). As such, where individuals are vulnerable to viewing violence as a social norm, rather than as a skill set learning in the military, there is a higher potential for engaging in violent offences. Similar research suggests that there is an increased likelihood of violent offending leading to arrest for those who have had combat experience (See: Elbogen *et al.*, 2014; MacManus *et al.*, 2013; Iversen *et al.*, 2012). Research by

MacManus *et al.* (2015) found that those with combat experience were reported as being up to 80% more likely to commit violent acts when compared to the civilian population. Amongst the types of violence cited (i.e. sexual violence, physical violence, and threats of violence), physical violence is most commonly cited across several pieces of literature (MacManus *et al.*, 2013; Forbes *et al.*, 2013). While personality traits and pre-enlistment experiences are cited as potential contributors to crime for the veteran population, the exact 'type' of veteran (i.e. those who sexually offend, those without family, those who leave prematurely), that is more likely to offend in civilian life remains obscured from the discourse (Bouffard, 2003).

Further, research by Glasser *et al.* (2002) explored how abuse experienced in childhood could increase an individual's vulnerabilities to various cognitive distortions and the development of PTSD. As a result of these experience, some individuals may be more vulnerable than others to developing unhealthy cognitions towards criminality. In addition to this research, Reavis *et al.* (2013) have found that traumatic incidents are reported with a higher frequency amongst the prison population compared to those who have no history of offending. Within the findings, sexual offenders and those with convictions related to child abuse were more likely to report instances of sexual abuse in childhood more than any other offender type (Reavis *et al.*, 2013). As such, their research advocated for the relationship between experiences of trauma and sexual offending in particular to be explored with greater frequency in order to understand the prevalence of sexual offending.

It is important to pause and emphasise that not all veterans who have experienced military service go on to commit acts of violence. Although the research has found that those who experience ACEs, PTSD, head injuries and alcohol misuse are more likely to cite these experiences as reasons for engaging in violent behaviour (See: Banks and Albertson, 2018; Rona *et al.*, 2015; MacManus *et al.*, 2013; Howard League, 2011; Elbogen *et al*., 2012). Further, Latimore *et al.* (2022) suggest having a traumatic brain injury may contribute to sexual violence in particular, as brain injuries have been found to impact impulsivity, cognitive functioning and emotional regulation. Accordingly, the findings suggest that the relationship between traumatic brain injuries and offending should not be understated. Research such as this, although limited amongst the wider literature, highlights additional vulnerabilities for veterans who

experienced violence in childhood, combat related injuries, or experienced physical trauma while in (Seamone, Holliday and Sreenivasan, 2018; MacManus *et al.*, 2013).

Research by Erickson *et al.* (2008) reported noteworthy findings when conducting research that explored the experiences of veterans who did not report instances of trauma and PTSD. The research, comprising of 36,385 US veterans found that individuals that presented with a higher risk of incarceration suffered from a combination of drug and alcohol misuse and depression, rather than PTSD. The findings suggest that other disorders, which have similar symptoms to PTSD, such as Schizophrenia and personality disorders were found to be less likely to lead to incarceration, even when combined with addiction (Erickson *et al..*, 2008). This is one of few studies that attempts to distinguish between a diagnosis of PTSD, general mental health disorders and an increase likelihood of incarceration for the veteran population.

There are calls for further research that speaks to the experiences of individuals who identify as mentally well- adjusted or without PTSD symptoms who are still involved with the criminal justice system, as violence related and sexual offences are so heavily represented amongst the veteran population (Erickson *et al.*, 2008; Finlay *et al.*, 2019). Research suggests that the frequency of sexual offending amongst the veteran population may be due to a variety of experiences (i.e. military service, trauma during military service, military sexual trauma, pre-enlistment adversity or trauma, or difficulties with identity readjustment), rather than related to a single characteristic or experience in the veterans lives (Finlay *et al.*, 2019; Taylor *et al.*, 2020). Finlay *et al.* (2019) suggests that for individuals with untreated mental health disorders or substance abuse problems, there may be a heightened risk for sexual offending due to distorted and dangerous cognitions around offending or previous experiences of unresolved trauma. However, their findings indicate a primary challenge to understanding the prevalence of sexual offending amongst the military population is due to the way sexual offences are categorized (i.e. incorporated into violence related categories and not specific to sexual offending) (Finlay *et al.*, 2019). Additional research by Seamone, Holliday and Sreenivasan, (2018) also suggest that due to sexual offences being incorporated into the same category as violence related offences, the prevalence of sexual offending amongst the veteran population is difficult to approximate within the civilian criminal justice system. Consequently, this gap in knowledge blinds researchers

and clinicians to the full scope of the problem (Finlay *et al.*, 2019; Seamone, Holliday and Sreenivasan, 2018).

Whilst the volume and nature of research funding is always insufficient, there was a welcome and sizable investment in the literature exploring the relationship between trauma related mental health disorders (i.e. PTSD, C-PTSD) and incarceration for veterans (See: Karatzias *et al.*, 2017; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Murphy *et al.*, 2019). Further, the need to look beyond PTSD and consider how the combined experiences of poor mental health, combat experiences, financial instability and antisocial behaviour can all intersect and lead to incarceration is needed, particularly for the veteran population (Brooke and Gau, 2018; Snowden *et al.*, 2017; Wright and Patrick, 2019).

2.9   Summary of the Review

This literature review has presented research and evidence across a range of disciplines and a variety of sources in order to provide a holistic and comprehensive review of what is known about the relationship between military service and incarceration as a veteran. Nevertheless, there are a multitude of literature that could not be explored within the parameters of this literature and the choice of what to select and exclude is all mine and a weight of responsibility and frustration that should not be under-estimated.

The review began by exploring the challenges and experiences that incarcerated veterans may face during the pre-enlistment, military and civilian transition. In addition to this, the review explored some of the theoretical understandings of the factors that influence a veterans' willingness to engage in help seeking, how transitions and turning points are experienced and explored and the barriers to desistance for the veteran population. The literature review demonstrates an awareness of the need to establish stronger theoretical links between the early childhood experiences of justice involved veterans, trauma, joining the military at a young age and the criminal justice system.

Nevertheless, there are a multitude of literature that could not be explored within the parameters of this literature. An example of the literature that is not explored in depth in this research includes works around group dynamics and processes, more in depth contributors to homelessness, and diversity challenges in the military. A future approach to this research would incorporate those topics as a means to provide a wider

lens of challenges that face incarcerated veterans. Importantly, lessons learned around conducting an interdisciplinary study include conducting a systematic literature search with a strict protocol prior to embarking on the initial search strategy. Following this, engaging with multiple discipline specific search engines one at a time is recommended as a means to prevent duplicate search results and time spent filtering.

Lastly, as some of the research that guides this study is historical and seminal in nature, lessons learned around limiting the scope of the search strategy include separating the amount of seminal research incorporated into each chapter prior to expanding the literature search further. By focusing the literature in this way, the most recent literature can be incorporated into the research over extended periods of time while still giving space to the more foundational literature that guides what we know about veterans' lives. Over the course of this research study, an abundance of literature on the topic of veterans' lives and challenges has been explored. A benefit of this production of knowledge allowed for this literature review to showcase the continuous calls to action that have been made on behalf of veterans over the last one hundred years alongside the more recent works that advocate for veterans and their families. The following chapter includes the methodologies utilised for the purposes of this research study, along with reflections and lessons learned from the research study.

2.10 Research Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of the study was to explore the lived experiences of incarcerated veterans throughout Scotland, UK as a means to understand what may contributed to their incarceration post military service. A secondary aim of the study was to explore the relationships that might exist between adverse childhood experiences, trauma, 'fractured' masculine identities and the commitment of serious offences as advocated in the literature (See: McGarry and Walklate, 2011; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011). The objective of the study was to uncover further ways in which prevention and desistance from criminal pathways/outcomes can be better supported for those with 'complicated' veteran identities (See: Albertson, Irving and Best, 2015; Demers, 2011). As such, a qualitative exploratory study was undertaken to explore the biographical understandings of the events that incarcerated veterans believed to have impacted their transition to and from military life, and further, to incarceration.

2.10.1 Primary Research Questions

The study will answer the following research questions in order to achieve the aims mentioned above:

1. What characteristics and experiences are present in incarcerated Scottish veterans' life histories?

2. How are the factors that contributed the veterans joining and subsequently leaving the military influential in their life histories?

3. What types of policy changes are required to better support veterans' transitioning into and out of the military?

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the design, merit and execution of the study throughout the following four sections. The first section (3.2) presents the philosophical foundations of the study, from those that inform the choice of paradigm to the axiological foundation that I bring to this enquiry as the researcher. The second section (3.3) details the design of the study, which explains the logics for each aspect of the design, (sample, data collection methods, data analysis plans) before attending to the issues of validity and that ethical standards that are embedded in the design decisions. Section 3.4 provides a review and illustrative examples of how the research progressed in practice, explaining the actualities of access, data collection and analysis, and the realities of ethical dimensions as they unfolded in these domains. The revelations provided in section 3.4 are a key component in terms of assessing the validity of the study and will be developed in the final section of the chapter (3.5). Therefore, the section is dedicated to sharing my evaluation of my practice, including what I now perceive as the strengths and weakness of it, and lessons learnt for future research practice.

3.2 Philosophical and interpretive frameworks

Necessarily, the chapter opens by presenting the philosophical foundations of the study, explaining the ontological and epistemological worldview that has led to the choice of paradigm for the study. There is also another dimension to the assumptions that inform and have some impact on the study, the axiological (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, cited in Creswell and Poth 2018:17) and thus the views and aspect of my biography that I bring to the research are also presented in this section.

3.2.1 Philosophical Foundations and Research Paradigm

Ontological beliefs about the nature of reality, and epistemological considerations about the development of knowledge are important factors that influence the design of social research. Even if these underlying influences are not made explicit, they can often be deduced from the design, methods and findings of the study (Blaikie and Priest 2022; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Nonetheless, it is important that a research study have the beliefs and assumptions that guide it made clear in the beginning of the research process (Hays and Wood, 2011; Madill, Jordan and Shirley, 2000), not least because this is an important aspect in judgements about the validity of the claims the researcher is

making. For robust research there needs to be coherence between the philosophical foundations, the research paradigm the researcher works within, and the design and execution of the study, again illustrating the need to render these foundations visible.

The use of the term 'paradigm' in this thesis follows the literature offered by Guba (1990) which is widely cited in the literature as a set of shared beliefs in a research field that guides action (See: Morgan 2007; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Time has passed since Morgan (1990) offered a robust conceptual tour of the different ways in which the term was being applied in research[23] and it is now usual to see terms other than 'paradigm' being used to describe to the same phenomenon. For example, Creswell and Creswell (2017) conceive of 'philosophical worldviews', and Denzin and Lincoln (2011, cited in Creswell and Poth 2018:17) identify 'interpretive frameworks'. Whatever term researchers adopt, some researchers may be committed to work within a particular research paradigm throughout their research endeavours, reflecting their metaphysical view of how the world can be known. Others may move between different positions over time, which may reflect their movements between disciplinary boundaries or openness to new ideas as careers progress. Over time, and with a more nuanced landscape of different paradigms within qualitative research[24], the practice of undertaking research guided by more than one paradigm has become acceptable although there clearly has to be coherence between those chosen.

A rich landscape of typologies that map different research 'paradigms' has therefore developed. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2011, cited in Creswell and Poth 2018:17) identified nine, whilst Blaikie and Priest (2019) offer an expansive contemporary mapping of eleven research paradigms. Nonetheless, these contemporary constellations are still built from the traditional paradigm choices that have continued to inform psychological and sociological inquiry. The seminal framing of paradigm choices offered by Lincoln and Guba (1994) consisted of four options: positivism, post positivism, critical theory and constructivism. However, the existence of the 'traditional' positivist worldview is now so contested that many contemporary frameworks refer only to a neo- or post- positivist approach. In addition to a neo/post

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[23] Whilst it is beyond the scope of this study/chapter to delve further, the aforementioned text is an important conceptual review that has contributed to the development of this study (Morgan, D L, 2007) Paradigms Lost and Pragmatism Regained, in Plano Clark and Creswell 2008: 29-65

[24] For examples, see Blaikie and Priest (2022) and/or Creswell and Creswell (2017).

positivist paradigm, a critical or transformative paradigm/worldview is central to any typology, as is a constructivist or interpretivist approach (i.e. Blaikie and Priest 2019; Creswell and Creswell, 2017). A fourth approach, Pragmatism, is present as one of the traditional paradigm in some instances (See: Creswell and Creswell 2017; Morgan 2007) and it is worth noting that its value is proposed in terms of enabling research or researchers to be driven more by methodological decisions of addressing the problem, rather than being constrained by adherence to a metaphysical dogma.

This doctoral study has been undertaken within a constructivist research paradigm. As a psychological practitioner with a developing grounding in sociology, I came to this enquiry with the view that there is no value in trying to access an objective reality. The world exists primarily as individuals subjectively experience it and thus reality is in this way socially constructed (See: Lincoln and Guba, 2005). Further, an epistemological position that considers the impact of meaning in/on the construction of knowledge was almost instinctive to me (Bryman, 2008). From a personal and professional perspective, I see exactly how important it is to understand the lived experience of individuals in order to see the world from their perspective, if one wants to help or understand their actions or views. Thus, for me, any enquiry that seeks to understand the issue of why military veterans have come to be offenders, must begin by seeking to see their worlds as they have understood and experienced them.

3.2.2   A statement on positionality

Following insights into how the study was conceived alongside my beliefs, my years of training and practicing as a psychological practitioner, there are other aspects to my position as researcher which are also important to convey as part of the approach to the study. For example, my rationale to focus the study on incarcerated veterans, rather than non-offending veterans. As someone from a military family, and from a less advantaged socio-economic background, I have been invested in trying to showcase the complexity of service and transitions within these intersections within my professional role. Further, as a counsellor and psychological practitioner, working with offenders with consistent periods of recidivism, I have an instinct to understand the vulnerabilities of those who may offend as a means to interrupt periods of recidivism for the betterment of society and the individuals' families and communities in which they offend.

In revealing my positionality, I must also contemplate the values and potential biases that I may bring to this study. Given my professional training, I may have been more likely to interpret the participants experiences through a lens of vulnerability or I may have been more inclined to understand and explore the interpersonal contributors to offending, over the more sociological considerations. Similarly, I must also consider my potential bias towards the military due to my complex history with military service or my being less inquisitive towards those from poorer military family origins similar to my own. Conversely, as a female, I must consider the possibility of being more susceptible to bias when hearing understandings of violence particularly towards other women or children. Whilst the steps taken to reduce the potential for unintended bias during the study are relayed in the sections that follow, it is important that the potential weight of my history appears at the outset of this chapter.

3.3   Research Design

There is a clear rationale for a qualitative research design, stemming from the gaps in knowledge identified in the preceding chapters, the philosophical worldview stated earlier, and the nature of the research questions set. Specifically, the research study was a qualitative exploratory study, seeking to understand the lived experiences of incarcerated veterans in Scotland through a biographical lens. Individual semi-structured interviews were held to create understandings of individual biographies, in the belief that these opportunities to perceive lives as they unfolded over a longer timeframe (rare amongst studies of this population), would produce new insight. Scotland was selected as the case study for this inquiry, for a number of reasons.

As Chapter One illustrated, Scotland generally has higher rates of military service and of veterans present as a proportion of the population, compared to other UK nations. It has also been shown in Chapter One, that Scotland's criminal justice system is regarded as being the most progressive of the UK nations due to the support of the Veteran in Custody Service Officers (VICSO), which therefore makes it an important test bed for research about incarceration and/or the criminal justice system. Finally, as Robson (2011) usefully emphasises, practical reasons were also a key part of research design. Thus, undertaking the study within a university with very strong connections to the Scottish justice system, and in a nation the size of Scotland (smaller with stronger networks of association) meant that there was a unique opportunity to be able to access an extremely hard to reach population that evades many. The SPS identified two sites

which were known to home a greater proportion of veterans, which was appropriate considering the ongoing constraints on the criminal justice system and the large number of participants that offered to take part in this study.

3.3.1   The Interview Process

Individual, face-to-face interviews were chosen as the means of creating data. The aim of qualitative interviews is to guide, but to also provide participants the space to explore the specified phenomena through their own interpretation (Carroll and Rothe, 2010). Although questionnaires, structured interview questions, or even group interviews, were explored as options to gain access to the data, a more flexible approach was determined to be suitable due to my lack of formal interview experiences (Alderfer and Sood, 2016). Equally, a semi-structured interview guide allowed the participants to subjectively inform and guide the data for the research study (Alderfer and Sood, 2016; Willig, 2013). Research recommends a semi-structured interview schedule for the purposes of small, qualitative works, when the focus is on understanding an experience from various perspectives (Robson, 2002). Semi-structured format is regarded as a useful tool to uncover a diverse range of responses and explore how the participants made sense of their world and lived experiences. The value is in the capacity to produce subjective, context-laden data. A principle of this kind of qualitative interviewing is that interviewer and participant are engaged as the co-producers new knowledge. By allowing the participants to engage in the co-production of the research data through the use of their own language, through their relaying stories or introducing ideas or new discursive directions, qualitative research seeks to produce more valid understandings of the realities from the participants perspectives (Robson, 2002) Through the participants own words, I viewed my role as being there with the participants to explore how current literature could align with their experiences, as a means to further understand the contours of their lives and the experiences over that lifetime, that might be connected to their current incarceration.

3.3.2   Sampling Decisions

In the beginning, the study intended to welcome all genders and would sample for diversity if recruitment exceeded expectations. A provisional sample size of 12 was aimed for and deemed manageable over the timeframe for in depth biographical interviews (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). However, after considerations by the

ethical committee of the SPS, female veterans were not able to be interviewed due to ongoing research already occurring within the prison service at a high frequency. Further, it was determined that the study would welcome any veteran regardless of which armed service they were enlisted in, the amount of time served in the military, the reasons for discharge, their rank on discharge or the nature of their index offence. The study excluded reservist veterans and those who had left before 2005. Reservists are known to occupy a more complex military identity and those who left prior to 2002 were deemed to have experiences quite different from those who have left since then (Cornish and Doorman, 2015[25])'. The study also took steps to avoid recruiting veterans who could be regarded as vulnerable due to the presentation of mental health difficulties. The protocols for this are explained further in this chapter.

3.3.3 The Data Analysis Plan

From the outset, the research intended to take a pluralistic approach to the phenomenon being investigated, which reflected a gap that needed to be addressed in the literature. The design decision was also influenced by my positionality as a psychological practitioner while adding the value of sociological enquiry to my toolkit. However, the feasibility of a pluralistic approach was to be tested and developed as the study progressed. If it was not viable, either due to the lack of suitability of the data for a pluralistic analysis, or to my capacities as a relatively new researcher, then a singular approach would have been adopted. Over time, as my competence developed, I became entirely convinced that pluralism was not only possible but vital.

The study intended to explore the experiences conveyed by participants through the use of Thematic Analysis (TA) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke *et al.,* 2015). Amongst the social science literature, research that utilises pluralistic methods in its research design is increasing (Frost and Nolas, 2011; Clarke *et al.,* 2015). The use of more than one qualitative analytical method can be purposeful when seeking to produce a diverse view of a phenomenon that has been explored within a single data set or discipline previously (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke *et al.,* 2015). In many types of research, the utilisation of two methodologies is not always appropriate. However, when the

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[25] The authors make the distinction, noting that MoD operates under significant socio-economic constraints since 2002, which was explored further in Chapter One.

application of numerous methods of analysis is practical and allows for the data to speak to subjects such as psychology, as well as other social sciences, the outcomes may speak to its benefits (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This research accepts that there are various methodological approaches and epistemological stances that could explore the biographies presented in this study. In this instance, the use of TA and IPA allowed for the nuances that occurred within the interview room to be explored in a way that gave space to both the words presented by the participants and a potential wider meaning. Section 3.7 describes the processes of pluralistic approach in detail.

The ability to explore the phenomenon without the limitations imposed by a singular framework or perspective opened up the possibility for the data to be interpreted to its fullest value (Braun and Clarke, 2006). One of the many advantages of utilising a pluralistic approach was the provision of the tools needed to support the research in attending to different parts of the data, therefore reducing the likelihood of reductionism that can occur amongst rich data sets (Kincheloe, 2001; Berry and Kincheloe, 2004). By allowing the data to be explored within numerous methodologies, the analysis process was able to adapt to the context of the research rather than be potentially constricted (Chamberlain, 2011). In addition to this, the use of pluralistic analysis processes allowed for a way of working that viewed the data collectively as a means to be showcased in tandem rather than through an individual lens.

While the advantages of utilising pluralistic analysis processes has been noted in the literature, the challenges in ensuring the correct use of analytical pluralism are equally noted (Frost and Nolas, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2006). As such, when determining which methodologies to utilise for this research study, the potential use of contradictory approaches, the potential for decreased validity and the impact of researcher bias was considered at length during the design phase (Kincheloe, 2001). To ensure the processes were being adhered to correctly, a vigorous reflective process was adhered to in order to maintain an awareness of my rationale for using these methodologies and to stay attuned to how the data was being constructed (Kincheloe, 2001). Lastly, research echoes the advantages of utilising qualitative pluralism as a means to increase opportunities for the research to be disseminated (Frost and Nolas, 2011; Clarke *et al.,* 2015). As this study aimed to support those that work with veterans in a variety of settings, the use of analytical pluralism may allow for the research to be utilised and disseminated more diversely.

3.4 Ethics

The British Sociological Association (2017) provides a succinct statement of all dimensions of ethical practice, the most pertinent of which are addressed here and are common to many professional ethics standards. In the conduct of research, we enter into a personal and moral relationship with those we study. We have a duty to protect and care for participants' and uphold standards of trust and integrity in our relationship with them. Qualitative research has issues of power at its heart and thus, the way in which the participants are recruited, informed of the research process, and engaged with throughout is paramount to their wellbeing. Further, the way in which the participants words and experiences are represented throughout demand important consideration within any ethical framework. Given my experience as a counsellor, it was equally important to be transparent with the participants about my professional background as well as my relatively limited experiencing conducting formal interviews under the guise of research. Equally, it was important that I be able to utilise both of these positions to ensure the participants were psychologically competent and safe to take part in a study such as this.

When developing the initial recruitment materials, there was some awareness of potential literacy challenges, therefore, the materials were developed with simple phrases and terms, the interview schedule was made available to them at all times so they were aware of which questions would be asked. During the introduction process to each participant, the full research process, including the right to withdraw was conveyed verbally to ensure the participants understood the journey they were about to embark on. Further, considering the positionality of myself and the participants, the participants were reminded that they were safe to withdraw from the research at any time or not respond to any of the questions being posed. It was also reiterated to the participants that participation would not result in financial or other benefits, such as advocacy or impact on sentencing.

When conducting research with individuals who may be deemed vulnerable or at risk of exploitation, the consideration of power in recruitment is paramount (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009). For this reason, the VICSO's were asked to address any withdrawal of consent requests confidentially and sensitively to ensure the participants felt safe throughout the recruitment and research process. This process was conducted verbally between the VICSO's and myself prior to the beginning of interview

day and within each interview site. Additionally, the aforementioned measures were taken to mitigate the participants' potential feelings of obligation or pressure to take part.

Considering the potential for risks to myself as a researcher, as a female mental health practitioner with a significant professional history working with sexual offenders, I felt safe engaging in this type of research. Further, the VICSO's and the prison staff ensured that I was familiar with the specific protocols in the prison environments and ensured my safety at all times. From an interpersonal position, I was aware of the possibility of vicarious trauma, particularly as a woman who would likely encounter those who had been deemed guilty of committed violent acts, inclusion sexual violence. Therefore, the intention was for the interviews was to be spread out over time, allowing time to process tales.

Research by Tracy and Henricks (2017) identify transparency and strong ethical practices as cornerstones of good qualitative research. Therefore, given the number of veterans that were presenting with narrations of sexual violence, it was deemed appropriate that I engage in the use of psychological support, normally termed Clinical Supervision, within the field of mental health. The purpose of this support was to ensure that I was engaging in safe and credible research practices, given issues of transference or bias may influence the research process.

Whilst the above is a snapshot of the wider landscape of procedural ethics process, ethical approval was granted by Edinburgh Napier University in May 2017 and by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in March 2018 (See: Appendix Two) (Tracy and Henricks, 2017). A further reflection on situational ethics is presented next as trust and power were considered at great lengths throughout the research process.

3.4.1 Trust and Power

The research design and implementation followed to the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the British Sociological Association's (BSA) protocols on ethical practice (BPS, 2021; BSA, 2017). Research recommends that trust remain central to the relationship between the interviewer and the participant (BSA, 2017). In order to establish trust, specifically with the criminal justice population, research advocates for informative processes to be employed when engaging with the research process (Denzin, 2001). As such, I made every attempt to answer the participants' truthfully

when queried and respond kindly if an inappropriate question was posed. Importantly, the process of bracketing allowed me to identify any biases I may have had at the time of interview, especially when the participants were expressing views that were counter intuitive to my own. While I considered myself a reflective practitioner, this process was especially important when working with the participants who were charged with offences deemed 'serious offences'. As such, bracketing helped me to have confidence in my reflections and that I was doing all that I could to ensure that I was co-creating an environment that was free from judgement in order to build a relationship of trust.

Miner-Romanoff (2012) suggests that the process of trust building can prevent the redirection of important subject matter to irrelevant topics while also allowing space to correct misunderstood reflections. In order to maintain my own level of authenticity, I chose not to deviate away from any subjects brought up by the participants or 'fact check' the participants throughout the interviews. As a measure of ensuring a 'factual' coproduction of knowledge could occur following the interviews, it was agreed with the SPS that I could, upon receiving approval from the participants, be informed of their formal charges and be informed of any charges that were formally filed against the participant within twelve months prior to their incarceration. Each participant gave their consent for this information to be shared following the interview process.

The experience of speaking to the veterans without knowledge of their prior offences allowed me the opportunity to explore my own prior conceptions of the veterans experiences, situate my understanding of their experience in their 'natural world', and further break down their experiences to the essential elements that informed their world view in that moment. When appropriate, I shared my notes with the participants as a way of 'member checking' (Denzin, 2001). This process allowed me to reconstruct the experiences that I historically understood as contributing to poor help seeking in the veteran population and place the phenomenon within their 'social world' and through their voice (Denzin, 2001).

Although some research rejects the masculine paradigm within hierarchical research relationships (i.e. the female researcher vs the male offender), it felt prudent to make a concerted effort to address the imbalance of power in the early stages of the interview, in order to engage in the type of dialogue that was not constricted by perceived gender (Oakley, 1981). However, the power dynamic between the participants, the prison officers and myself often influenced the relationships and the

interactions that were occurring throughout the interview stage. The experience of being interrupted by the officers put me in the position of having to choose between asserting my power in the room in order to maintain the relationship with the participant or allowing the situation to be managed by the officers. As I became more familiar with the prison officers assisting with the study, the power shifted back to me as they allowed me to control the timings more. However, for several of the interviews, the dichotomy between those who had the power and those who did not shifted in ways that potentially could not be anticipated.

3.4.2 Reciprocal Trust

Research that addresses trust and broken trust highlights how research interviews can mimic characteristics of interpersonal relationships (i.e. laughing, sharing personal information, making first disclosures of deeply protected information) (Baier, 1986; Hardin, 2002). The role of the *truster* (i.e. the individual being given the power through truth) in the interviews shifted between myself, as the person accepting the others truth without question, and the participant, who offered their truth without an apparent apprehension. Importantly, with the consideration around researcher trust and approachability, there were several instances where I felt as though my interpersonal characteristics were hindering what the participants were sharing with me. Throughout this study, I took into consideration how my position as a psychological practitioner, as well as a researcher, could influence the level of collaboration that occurred in the interviewing process and kept structured notes throughout the interviews as a means to stay focused on the interview questions in front of me.

Reflections around truthfulness and vulnerability were particularly impactful with one participant, as he was untruthful about his index offences to quite a significant degree. It would be speculatory to try to dismantle why he was untruthful in our interviews as this was not addressed with him during the interviews. However, the extent of his lack of truthfulness contributed to my engaging in a form of clinical supervision as a means to address this experience and future interviews. Ultimately, it was not the sentiment around his dishonesty about his offences that impacted me but the way in which the experiences were described and the way in which these recollections guided the remainder of the interview. My lacking in the confidence to 'challenge' his narrations proved to be a missed opportunity during this research process.

3.5 Embedding Quality

There is a longstanding and rich scholarly dialogue surrounding appropriate ways in which the quality of qualitative research can best be evaluated. Creswell and Poth (2018) provide an abridged review of seminal work which progressed the development of measures for establishing forms of validity and reliability of qualitative research. This is a useful historical browse of criteria and concepts that continue to be deployed and refined as qualitative enquiry continues. The absence of a universal framework, after decades of methodological development and debate is, as Tracy and Hinrichs (2017:1) suggest, a fitting reflection of the 'creative complexity associated with the localised, contextual work of qualitative research'. Nonetheless, those authors contend there is a need for a framework for establishing criteria for quality, that can be widely utilised to evaluate qualitative research undertakings and provide evidence that that Tracy's (2010) 'Big Tent' model, is becoming recognised as a useful benchmark in the assessment of the quality of qualitative research.

The research design therefore followed the criteria discussed in Chapter Two, developed by Tracey (2010) coined *Eight 'Big Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research.* As such, from the early stages of the research design, the study has prioritised being worthy of exploration, timely, and meaningful (Tracey, 2010). Within Chapter Two, a revised table highlighting how the use of the 'Big Tent' guided the literature review was provided. In addition to this, further on in this chapter, there is also a revised table showcasing how this research study has aligned with the criteria over time. Table Four below provides a visual representation of the original criteria, which has been utilised in the design of this research study.

The authors acknowledged that the relevance of each criteria will vary according to the nature of the particular qualitative research and that some criteria may not be valid to a study at all (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017). After the next section which provides insight into how the research unfolded and key moments that I believe the reader ought to be aware of, the end of this chapter will provide a reflection on the evaluation of the quality of this study, from my perspective having completed it.

Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting
Rich rigor	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes
Sincerity	The study is characterized by • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges
Credibility	The research is marked by • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflections
Resonance	The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations • Transferable findings
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically
Ethical	The research considers • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)
Meaningful coherence	The study • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other

Table 4: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research: Source: Tracy, 2010.

3.6   Execution of the Study and Situated Ethics

3.6.1   Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited by the Scottish Prison Service's Veteran in Custody Support Officer (VICSO) in two Scottish prisons. Access to the prisons was negotiated with the SPS, where the VICSO facilitated the interviews and meetings with the relevant stakeholders (i.e. the prison governors, the mental health counsellors, the VICSO and the prison officers). The prisons were identified through recommendation

of the VICSO who had a clearer understanding of the distribution of veterans because of their unique role.

The recruitment process involved flyers (See: Appendix Three) being left in various strategic places by the VISCOs over a four-month period. The flyers were left in the recreation room, in a shared area that was utilised by veterans for their weekly 'Veterans Coffee Morning' (VCM), and in family waiting areas facilitated by the Families Outside organisation at two of the prisons[26]. After reading the flyer, interested veterans were directed to speak with the VICSO if they wanted to potentially take part. In terms of power dynamics and anonymity, this procedure compromised both. But it was unavoidable. It is worth contemplating if any other route could be utilised so that veterans might have been able to contact the researcher without VISCO's being aware. Particularly when it is known that veterans do not self-identify in the prison setting. Due to the reported working relationship between the VICSO's and the participants (VICSO's tend to be former military and have weekly meetings with the veterans), the VICSO's were deemed the most appropriate to help support the research.

The flyer asked participants with any experience in the UK military to share their experiences of their time in the military. There was no formal definition of the term 'Veteran' stated on the recruitment flyer. On reflection it might have been useful to state the definition of the veteran, meaning anyone who had served even one day, could take part. As the research has found that veterans sometimes exclude themselves from the category because they hold a particular view of the concept (i.e. combat experience, time served), the inclusion of the definition may have increased the participant population (Dandeker *et al.,* 2006).

Following an expression of interest, the VICSO then provided a participant information sheet and a biographical questionnaire at the following VCM and during recreational periods (See: Appendix Four). Subsequently a consent form was provided if the participant decided to progress (See: Appendix Five). If volunteers were believed to be in a fit state of mind, the VICSO arranged for the interview and the participants brought both the consent form and the questionnaire to the interview. Additionally, copies had been made of the consent forms to be kept by SPS.

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[26] The original intention of the study was also to include family members, but this proved unobtainable. Despite fourteen months of effort.

At the initial start of the interview, nine of the fifteen participants completed both forms, with the remaining participants completing the consent form and the questionnaire at the start of the interview. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw their consent at any time verbally and in writing. However, due to the nature of the interviews and scheduling, any withdrawal requests would have to be through the VICSO. This could not be mitigated at the time of the interviews. There were no requests for withdrawal during the research process. Although as previously noted, one interview was not utilised for research purposes due to the participants' presentation at the time of interview.

There was no fixed time limit on the recruitment phase, primarily because of the precarious nature of the prison setting and relentless competing demands on the workforce. The recruitment process was drawn to an end when twenty participants had volunteered to take part. As stated earlier, qualitative research is not necessarily fixed at the outset, and it is a virtue of the approach that plans can change in response to the emerging landscape so the participant pool was allowed to expand. Part of the reason for not sampling from those that volunteered initially was due to exploratory nature of the study, therefore, all that volunteered were welcome. Following this, it was deemed insensitive to turn away those who had volunteered as there were external considerations that warranted attention (i.e. their willingness to engage, the VICSO's involvement and efforts to recruit and the environment in which the participants were situated). Further, given the difficulty in accessing this population, it was deemed unwise to restrict the amount of data that could be derived from the interviews. Reflections on how the amount of data retrieved further influenced the study are presented later on in the chapter.

3.6.2 Research Sample

Twenty veterans volunteered for interview. However, four withdrew on the day of interview and one interview was suspended as the participant was deemed unsuitable due to concerns about their mental health (reportedly as a consequence of a lack of mental health support and a reported lapse in their taking a prescribed medication for a diagnosed mental health disorder). While the excluded interview continued in a more informal manner following the conversation about their lack of medication, it was agreed between the participant and myself that their interview would not be included in the research study. Further discussion around the ethical implications for conducting

qualitative research with vulnerable populations is discussed later on in this chapter in the section titled *Managing the potential for distress* and *Safeguarding*.

In total fifteen interviews were included in this study and are highlighted in the participant profile below (See: Figure Sixteen and Seventeen). As evidenced in the profile, the participants represented all three branches of the military, with participants having served as Regulars who experienced combat, international deployment and UK based training between 1997 and 2015. The participants ranged in their service history with the least amount of time serve noted as three months and the longest period of service noted at over fifteen years. Each participant identified as a Caucasian male and were aged eighteen to fifty at the time of interview. Participants varied in their socio-economic, education, and employment backgrounds. Participants from both the mainstream and a sexual offending unit took part, with a higher prevalence of participants represented by those with sexual offending histories.

Participant Profiles

Figure 16: **Participant profiles developed to help guide the reader in the participant population**

Sean
- ✓ Boy Soldier
- ✗ Youth Offending
- ✓ ACE's (Maternal Abandonment/ severe sexual abuse)
- ✓ Served over five years
- ✓ Trauma while in
- ✓ Combat related PTSD
- ✓ Offending while in
- ✗ Military support for drinking
- ✗ MoD transitional support
- ✗ Veteran Identity
- ✗ Family Support
- ✗ Contact with children

Nick
- ✓ Boy Soldier
- ✓ Cited Service to the Queen
- ✗ Served over five years
- ✓ Youth Offending
- ✓ ACE's (Numerous)
- ✓ Combat related trauma
- ✓ Reports PTSD related symptoms
- ✗ Military Support with offences
- ✓ History of recidivism
- ✓ Cited likelihood to re-offend
- ✗ MoD transitional support
- ✗ Veteran Identity
- ✗ Family support
- ✗ Contact with children

Dan
- ✓ Boy Soldier
- ✓ ACE's (Numerous)
- ✗ Served over five years
- ✓ Reported PTSD related symptoms
- ✓ Offending while in
- ✗ Military support
- ✗ MoD Transitional Support
- ✗ Family Support
- ✗ Contact with children
- ✗ Veteran Identity

James
- ✓ Boy Soldier
- ✓ Served over five years
- ✓ Youth Offending
- ✓ ACE's (Numerous)
- ✓ Combat related PTSD
- ✓ Offending while in
- ✗ Military support
- ✗ Veteran Identity
- ✗ MoD transitional support
- ✗ Family Support

Chris
- ✗ Boy Soldier
- ✗ Youth Offending
- ✓ ACE's (Numerous/ Severe sexual abuse)
- ✓ Trauma while in
- ✓ Served more than five years
- ✓ Offending while in
- ✓ Straight from military to prison
- ✗ Military support
- ✓ Life Sentence
- ✓ Veteran Identity
- ✗ Family Support

Max
- ✓ Boy Soldier
- ✓ Served over five years
- ✓ ACE's (Numerous)
- ✓ Trauma while in
- ✓ Reports PTSD related symptoms
- ✓ Offending while in
- ✓ Involvement with military corrections
- ✗ MoD transitional support
- ✗ No contact with children
- ✗ Family Support
- ✗ Veteran Identity

Richard
- ✗ Boy Soldier
- ✗ Served over five years
- ✓ ACE's (Numerous)
- ✓ Youth Offending
- ✓ Offending while in
- ✓ Post Secondary Education
- ✗ MoD transitional support
- ✗ Family Support
- ✗ Veteran Identity

Lewis
- ✓ Boy Soldier
- ✗ Served over five years
- ✓ Youth Offending
- ✓ ACE's (Maternal abandonment/ financial exploitation)
- ✓ Offending while in
- ✓ Involvement with military corrections
- ✓ History of recidivism
- ✓ Cited a high likelihood to re-offend
- ✓ Family Support
- ✓ Contact with children
- ✗ MoD transitional support
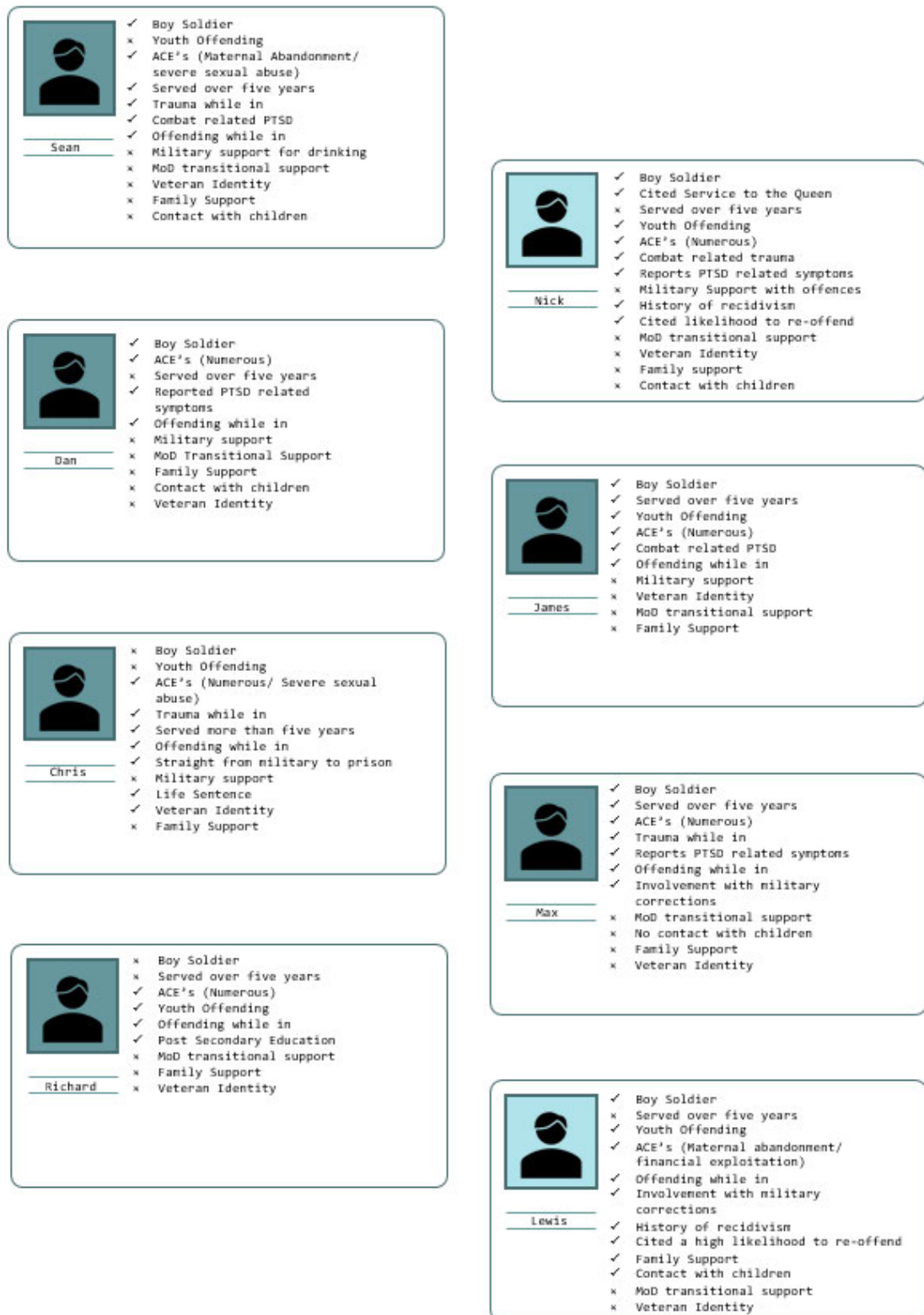- ✗ Veteran Identity

Figure 17: **Participant profiles developed to help guide the reader in the participant population**

3.7   Research Interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were held face to face across two Scottish Prison sites. As the interviews were held within a secure unit in each prison, the ability to speak face to face and in isolation, away from their fellow inmates opened up the possibility for an unfiltered exchange. The interviews lasted from one hour and a half to two hours long and followed a loosely structured interview schedule (See: Appendix Six). The interview schedule consisted of five pages, sectioned with open ended questions. Prompt questions were included to facilitate conversation, particularly to encourage participants to give specific examples of the situations or difficulties they were describing.

In order for an in-depth analysis to be possible, the interviews were recorded so that the data could be consistently reviewed (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2011). While this process of recording did allow for the researcher to be more present, it was initially off putting for the participants in this study. The participants often verbally and visually expressed a lack of comfortability with the recorder being present. When this occurred, the participants were reminded that all conversations were confidential unless a risk to self or other was reported within the interview. Over time, the recorder was put further and further out of site of the participant, in an effort to encourage them to feel psychologically more comfortable with the idea that their life histories would be recorded. The utilisation of the field notes taken in the interviews became an essential supplement during the analysis stage as several instances of background noise impacted the recordings. Additionally, the use of field notes was useful when region specific terminology and jargon was used as I was able to return to the tapes and the notes during the transcription and write up stages. Finally, the process of bracketing in the field notes was utilised throughout the interview process in order to capture the nuances that could not be encompassed in the recordings (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2011).

3.7.1   Interviewing in the Prison setting

Inevitably, any interview is influenced by the context in which it takes place. I made sure I was well versed in the safety protocols for my time on site and allowed plenty of time so I could compose myself in case of delays. It was usual for me to be in the interview room and the participant escorted to the room. However, at times, I was waiting in the interview area prior to the participants coming in. During these periods, the participants were witnessed actively engaging and talking with whoever was

escorting them on the day. The overall approachable nature of the participants was conveyed in all of the interviews but one. Due to being in a period of 'lockdown' for over two hours on one of the interview days, one participant was not happy to be attending the interview after such a delay and this took some time to navigate following the initial introduction.

As a means to facilitate a safe and trusting research environment, I attempted an informal dialogue at the beginning of each interview with information about the study and my motivation for conducting this research (Hemming *et al.*, 2021). It was also a vital ethical point to ensure each participant fully understood informed consent and so I sought to talk through the recruitment material and consent form. Following this, the participants could ask questions directly to me and I could emphasise the more salient points (i.e. right to withdraw, limits to confidentiality, no reward or consequence to taking part). Although some of the participants sat patiently as we worked through the consent paperwork and the questionnaire, many others appeared as though they wanted to 'jump right in'. I am aware this is potentially due to my accent and my visual presentation at the time (as a younger, female researcher), however, it felt at the time that it was more because the participants were eager to share their stores. The experience of someone listening to their stories was an experience several participants said was lacking throughout their life histories.

While the participants often commented on the positive impact of the interview process, there were unspoken mediators that did affect quite a few of the interviews. In two of the interviews, there was an apparent presence of anxiousness, which I felt was about participants' feeling unsafe, was actually spoken of and subsequently explored as a consequence of undiagnosed PTSD. This is explored throughout the Findings chapters. Additionally, throughout some of the interviews, participants realigned their chairs, asked for the time, and moved the tape recorder back and forth across the table highlighting potential stages of comfortability. At no stage did I correct these behaviours, but I did ask if they wanted water or to take a break or to stop the interview entirely. To note, the prison officers provided water in the room with cups at the beginning of each interview and the offer of water was taken up by several of the participants. The intent of these small acts of kindness was well received by both myself and the participants.

Further, to give context to the environment in which the interviews took place, each interview room was self-contained with a small window that faced the interview room waiting area. At the far side of each waiting room is where the prison officers were stationed at their desks. Each waiting area had three to six interview rooms, with several chairs alongside the far wall. Alongside the interview rooms was a long hallway which staff entered on one side and on the following side, the prisoners entered and exited the waiting area. The presence of other prisoners was a noted distraction during some of the interviews, as was the pacing of the prison officers throughout the interviews. Due to being told that the interviews would be private and timed, I was not anticipating the high frequency of 'checking in' by the prison officers. In several instances, prison officers would interrupt the interview, stand outside the window of the interview room or tap their watches as a means to hurry the interview. As the interviews were given allotted time slots, at no time did the interviews run over, nor did the officers have reason, verbal or otherwise, to interrupt the interviews. The lack of privacy awarded during the interviews appeared to be both a safety measure and, in my opinion, also acted as a display of power and authority. I doubt I would have been at risk with the participants selected for me, but there did seem to be an almost constant reminder that there was someone watching the participants at any given moment.

Further, due to the prison officers pacing outside of the interview room, several of the participants appeared to experience a sense of hypervigilance. I did not take action to ask the officers to refrain from this action as I frankly was aware of their power at that time. They had the power to stop the interviews or to limit the already graciously allotted freedoms that were allotted to me during the interview days. However, at the time, the officers may have provided an unknowingly opportunity to further develop trust with the participants, as my feelings about the interruptions (annoyed and frustrated, although also scared for how their actions would influence the data), were picked up by some of the participants. It was in these moments that they realised that I was not in a power position, that like them, I could not simply do what I wanted, when I wanted. It was in many ways contributory to several of the participants and I experiencing moments of comradery 'against the man', as one participant framed it.

While I may have perceived the prison officers to be intimidating at times or potentially overbearing, I was never made me feel to feel unwelcome or unsupported at

each of the prisons. I contribute these positive experiences to the VICSO at each of the institutions. Their support in the completion of this study and the provision of support that was noted by the participants was an invaluable resource. With regard to the participants' expression of gratitude to the VICSO, the power dynamic between the veterans and the VICSO was considered prior to the recruitment stage. As such, the flyers were requested to be left in the recreation area rather than be given directly to any potential volunteers, and every attempt to re-iterate the participants' right to withdraw and statements of confidentiality were made throughout the interview process. The participants in each interview offered positive sentiment towards the VICSO and there was no sign of anyone feeling pressure to take part in the study. Whilst it is encouraging to see this positive relationship with VISCOs, I return to the issue of whether those without this relationship would have volunteered. Thus, the sample may be limited by the pro-VISCOs relationship.

The physical appearance of the veterans was also impactful to note with relation to their positionality in the prison. Within the prison setting, those who have been charged with sexual offences were dressed differently and located in different parts of the prison in comparison to the 'mainstream' offenders. Due to the interviews being held in quick succession due to scheduling requirements on behalf of the prisons, the 'mainstream' and the sexual offending participant populations often encountered each other at the cross over between one participant leaving and another joining me in the interview room. It was reported by one of the participants that these two groups rarely came into such close proximity to each other. These cross overs occurred twice more over the course of the interviews. Further methodological considerations about these interactions are explored later on in this chapter.

3.7.2 Managing the Potential for Distress

Participants were asked to give consent to be recorded during the initial start of the interview and asked for consent to use the interview data at the end of the interview (See: Appendix Five). Throughout the interviews, the participants were reminded that they could stop the interview at any time, and they could take breaks should they need to as advocated in the literature (Klykken, 2021; CIOMS, 2016). One participant asked to use the bathroom during the interview and the remaining declined to stop the interview or take a break. During the initial start of the interview, confidentiality and the research process was explained in depth. The participants' level of vulnerability was

considered at the initial contact to ensure the participants were safe and competent to take part in the study as recommended by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) (CIOMS, 2016). As such the VICSO's were asked to consider the mental health history and any potential safety concerns of any of the participants prior to setting up the interview. Following this, the participants were encouraged to set their own boundaries with regard to not answering questions they were uncomfortable with or stopping the interview should they feel as though they would be unable to manage any emotions that could arise from the interview process (CIOMS, 2016).

In two interviews, the participants expressed feelings of upset at the subject matter but declined stopping the interviews. As the participants expressed a willingness to continue and their safety was addressed, the interviews continued as requested by the participants. Interestingly, the overall emotions present in the interviews were that of excitement at the opportunity to talk about and be listened to about their life stories and in two instances, anger. When anger was presented in the room, two things are of note. One, I did not feel unsafe, they were not angry at me. Two, their anger was directed strictly to the military, even when childhood instances of abuse and trauma were being explored. During these periods, it felt pertinent to allow the participants to explore these feelings and realisations as they wanted. Of note, one of the fifteen interviews needed to be redirected as a means to potentially avoid the question about his offending history. When a participant started talking about my nationality, he accepted my redirected kindly and went straight back into the questions, but it was interesting to have this experience as I did not realise how the power I held at that time may have influenced the interviews.

3.7.3   Psychological Safety of the researcher

Important to note that while I did not feel physically unsafe, I did feel psychologically unsafe in some instances. In one particular interview, I choose to redirect the conversation when the participant was attempting to explain the reasons for his offences (several counts of sexual violence involving children). At this stage, I did not feel physically unsafe, but I did feel psychologically unsafe and reverted to the interview schedule to help redirect the participant back to the questions. This experience was explored with the support of my supervisors and the aforementioned counselling as a means to ensure I did not hinder the research process further. As this interview was

the second to last interview, in hindsight, I may simply have been experiencing feelings related to burn out as several of the previous interviews disclosed similar offences. Upon reflection, there is not much more I could have done in this instance, barring stopping the interview, which I did not feel was necessary at the time.

Upon further reflection, an additional interview was potentially hindered by my lacking extensive experience in the research process. During the interview, a participant was talking about his overtly masculine views on women in the military. He was presenting an agitated view towards women in the military take male roles, with a particular sense of maybe entitlement, which I was not comfortable with. Following this, as the orchestrator of the conversation, I believed we had enough dialogue about his views without needing to descend into what I feared was a thread about women generally. Therefore, I decided to interject to try to move the conversation on from this furrow. The conversation followed soon after the participant disclosed that two of his numerous ongoing charges included kidnapping and rape of a former colleague. I had not fully acknowledged the influence of his tone, his disclosure and his overall suffocating presence in the room at the time. However, upon reviewing the recording, my notes and later on the transcript, I was obviously uncomfortable with him at that time. Due to this unconscious feeling, I missed the opportunity to further discuss his views on weakness and how his offences impact his family relationships and potentially his social relationships as a consequence (See: Appendix Seven for an excerpt of the interview). The risk of conducting research with any population is that you might come across situations where you feel unsafe. While I have gained additional experience conducting interviews since that time, it is likely that as a female researcher I would still move the conversation along quickly if I felt my physical or emotional safety was at risk.

In other interviews, when there was a particular focus discussing instances of sexual offending, I was cognizant not to appear judgmental or to allow my facial impressions to potentially influence the participants' exploration. As I am naturally a facially expressive individual, as a means to mitigate any moments of imposition, I asked the participants for permission to take small notes as a means to remind myself of timings and uses of jargon at the beginning of each interview. Therefore, my taking notes was perceived as normal and did not appear to influence the participants' descriptions. Upon reflection, I intended this action to be for the participants' benefit,

however, it was for mine. In two instances, I found myself taking small notes as a means to redirect my gaze from the participants as their tone when describing their offences had incited a feeling of frustration in me. Their descriptions were at times unnecessarily graphic and the ways in which the experiences were conveyed at times appeared cavalier and void of emotion. At these moments, taking notes allowed me to avert eye contact and recalibrate.

3.7.4 Safeguarding

The research involved no risk of physical harm to participants but did carry a potential for psychological harm given that the research involved discussing life histories which may include traumatic experiences (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2009; Lenton *et al.,* 2021). As recommended in the literature, the participants were reminded about confidentiality and safeguarding procedures at the beginning of the interviews as a means of procedure but also a as a means to continue the development of trust (Furey *et al.,* 2010; Shaw *et al.,* 2010).

When interviewing people with convictions, there is a possibility for participants to disclose further instances of offending, potentially fearing that they may be incriminating themselves further. However, when the subject of re-incrimination arose, the subject of confidentiality and the research process was reiterated to revive the trust that had been built up. Throughout the interviews, the participants cited several instances of offending following these reiterations. Although to note, not all of the participants appeared to be worried about disclosing periods of offending as several of them noted that my view of offending was 'different' than theirs. Their views on offending are explored further in the Findings chapters. Further, the lack of fear of reprisal expressed in the interviews allowed for many of the veterans to speak freely about their involvement with the criminal justice system prior to joining the military and to go into greater detail about their offences, which ultimately helped inform the study further. Participants were advised via the participant information sheet and verbally, that in certain circumstances involving harm to self or harm to others, I would be required to disclose this information to the VICSO.

None of the participants cited experiencing the interview as a counselling session, but several noted their lack of experience talking about their lives. Consequently, many of the participants cited feelings of appreciation at being able to

talk about their lives in a space without judgement in the early stages of the interview. After each interview concluded, the participants were asked if they felt psychologically safe (although not in those terms) and were asked if they felt they required the opportunity to speak with a counsellor following the interview. None of the participants engaged in this offer, although several mentioned there were already on a waiting list to see the counsellor, which is explored further in the Findings chapters.

3.7.5   Personal Safety

Several reflections were noted throughout the research process around being a female researcher, conducting research in a small, and locked room with serious and sexual offenders. However, at no point did I ever feel physically unsafe with the participants. Of the fifteen participants, one made a few inappropriate comments about their sexuality and my relationship status, and one presented as 'unhappy' to be in the interview. Although when questioned about their presentation, the participant declined to stop the interview and continued to respond to the research questions when prompted.

During the interviews, I was accompanied by prison officers when navigating the institution and was afforded security throughout the interview process. As previously mentioned, the constant presence of the prison officers meant that I did not go more than five minutes without being checked on throughout any of the interviews. Importantly, I felt this did affect the production of the data. However, when conducting research in secured facilities, challenges around noise, interruption, disruption and unexpected occurrences, such as lock downs, should be expected. Viewing the interview process in this way allowed for me to continue with the research process as long as the participants expressed wanting to do so. As mentioned previously, in many ways, these occurrences made it feel like the participants and I were 'in it together'.

During the transfer into and out of the prison, I deferred to SPS protocols on institutional security throughout the interview process, which included safety protocols around staying behind the prison officer and maintaining a safe distance when passing prisoners. At no stage did security concerns arise. Additionally, a risk assessment was completed prior to visiting each prison site, which included being made aware of all exit strategies and lock down procedures. A lone working mobile app was also utilised to ensure at least one person was aware of my location at all times during the research process.

3.8   Data Protection and Confidentiality

The software programmes Dragon (Nuance, 2020) and Express Scribe (NCH, 2018) were used to transcribe the interviews. The transcription process allowed for any silences, nuances and breaks to be addressed while still allowing the participants to speak for themselves (Bazeley, 2007; Schegloff, 1997). Following transcription of the interviews into Microsoft Word, data were stored and managed using the specialist software for qualitative data NVivo (NVivo-7, 2019). All recordings and transcriptions are held on a secure and password protected university hard drive to ensure confidentiality was maintained.

A digital recorder was used to audio-record the interviews to preserve the integrity and completeness of the conversation. Prison sites were anonymised with number, the titles of Site 1 and Site 2. The participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, which were kept electronically, and password protected. The signed paper copies of the consent forms were kept in a separately contained folder in a lock box and separate from the electronic hard drive. All electronic data and paper copies of consent forms and the questionnaires will be discarded five years after completion of the thesis process.

3.9   Data Analysis Frameworks

3.9.1   Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) distinguishes itself from other approaches by providing clear links between influential themes, descriptions of a particular phenomenon and the aims of the study (Fereday *et al.,* 1997). The six stages of thematic analysis begin with an initial stage of become familiar with the data through listening, transcribing, reading and a repeated cycle of reading the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The second stage of developing codes and themes can arise once this process has occurred. The third stage involves the organisation of the data, where the main themes arise. Once the main themes have been identified, stage four involves the identification of any sub themes and any revisions to the ongoing themes. Throughout this process, the data is reviewed consistently to ensure the themes sit within the data set and appear in a cohesive pattern when possible. This process allows for the fifth stage of producing a final set of themes to be concrete and reliable. The final stage identifies how the themes fit together, conveying an 'essence' of what the data captures (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To engage in this approach requires the researcher to be clear about the intentions of the research, as the research can be conducted with inductive or deductive processes in mind. This decision calls for the researcher to be clear about the analysis being driven by a theoretical framework or by analytical preconceptions prior to the analysis stage (Patton, 1990). For the purposes of this research study, an inductive approach was utilised in order to provide a framework for understanding the experiences of veterans, as a means to prevent a restricted approach to the data (Patton, 1990). Further to this, the data were explored at a latent level of analysis to look beyond the verbatim or semantic accounts as a means to explore the participants' ideas, conceptions and assumptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

As the study was conducted with an under-represented population, the aim of TA was to identify, analyse and report on the themes more commonly presented by the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The methodology allowed for the data to be organised and described in detail while going a step further into the realms of interpretation and representation where other methodologies may be inappropriate (Boyatzis, 1998). Due to the epistemological flexibility and the fluidity of the approach, a number of research has successfully applied TA within a social constructionist framework when exploring similar social topics to that of the research study (Clarke and Kitzinger, 2004; Willig, 2013, Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.9.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an interpretative approach which aims to produce detailed insights into the lived experience through a described phenomenological account of an experience (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009; Langdridge, 2007). Developing as an approach over the last several decades, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger contributed to the theoretical use of IPA through an emphasis on exploring events not only as the experiences appear to an individual, but through the meanings they ascribe to those experiences (Langdridge, 2007). Within the research environment, a researcher is tasked with making sense of an individual trying to make sense of what is or has happened to them through the three principal theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiographic perpectives (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006, Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009).

Predominately utilised in the field of philosophy and psychology, IPA has evolved into a methodology that is beneficial to an intersection of social sciences as IPA adheres to a commitment that views individuals as having a connection between their experiences, what they say and their emotional state (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). More recently, IPA is argued as the most appropriate methodology to consider when exploring the human experience, as the methodology allows for both the experience and the meaning ascribed to be explored (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009).

The IPA process is similar to other methodologies in the way in which the data is collected, through individual or group interviews. The process diverges from the norm by viewing the researcher as having an active role in the process. The research is informed and influenced by the researcher but is also further complicated by their own misconceptions and bias. Husserl and Heidegger would argue that an essential demand of the approach requires the ability to locate people within a particular context, while not impeding on their exploration. It is the ability to gain insight into the situational, cultural and personal experiences of another, while also gaining insight into your own assumptions and bias that provides the most challenge during the process of interpretation (Husserl, 1997). Therefore, a two-stage process of interpretation was required, also termed 'a double- hermeneutic' as a means to explore the insights I held as the researcher and the participants (Packer and Addison, 1989; Palmer, 1969).

Throughout each analysis stage, the methodology required a constant revisiting of the text in order to analyse the thoughts, observations and reflections that occur throughout the qualitative interviews (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). This process requires a continuous revisit of the transcripts while reviewing in parallel, the brackets and notes that were part of the interview process. Importantly, this process requires for a constant analytical comparative process to occur which ensured the concept formulation was occurring, the unspoken was uncovered, and similarities were being brought into focus (Robson, 2002).

3.10 Data Analysis in Practice

3.10.1 Thematic Analysis

The analysis followed the six phases of Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first stage of the analysis process consisted of reading and transcribing the interviews, which has been argued to be the most important stage of the

process (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bird, 2005). In keeping with the commitment to idiographic processes and closeness, each interview was reviewed individually and in depth, with the recording listened to at least once and the transcript reviewed several times prior to the next interview being analysed (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006). During this time, instinctive thoughts and ideas about the data were noted down, as this was an essential aspect of the reflective process for me as I was holding the processes of IPA in mind as well (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Within each initial analysis stage, comments around frequently shared experiences, participant presentations and language were explored as a means to uncover any commonalities. Linguistic elements, such as laughter, pauses, tone, metaphors and colloquialisms that exist amongst the military population were considered as an essential part of the construction of the participants experiences (Smith, 2004; Billig, 1991). Experiences that were related to the participants' military service were coded collectively in the first instance and then analysed in greater depth prior to the second stage of analysis. During phase two, the transcripts were reviewed in further detail, allowing for experiences that were previously overshadowed to be examined in more depth. During this stage, both descriptive and interpretative processes were utilised to explore each potential theme that arose (See: Table Five). The large amount of data that was presented meant that a framework approach was appropriate to use as multiple disciplines could be explored in tandem (Braun and Clarke, 2006). By engaging in this method, further codes and themes were able to arise outside of methodological restrictions, thus strengthening the interpretation process, including literacy amongst the participants (Mays and Pope, 2000). Importantly, this format allowed the research to be explored in both a structural and yet creative manner, which was essential to the analysis findings (Ritchie *et al*., 2003).

During stage three, the transcripts were deconstructed into both clusters of meaning and more concrete themes, followed by a reconstruction of the data into larger themes and subthemes. Utilising a polarization method to search for emerging themes that may otherwise go unexplored, the process of distinctly identifying key periods of the biographical accounts assisted in uncovering several themes that were initially missed (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006). As the analysis process was recursive, each stage was returned to in several instances throughout the analysis stage (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Through the use of TA, the ability to capture

the themes that spoke to the research questions arose from an inductive approach, rather than a deductive approach. The themes identified were strongly linked to the data and were subsequently not driven by a theoretical interest (Patton, 1990). While much of the data could be restricted to one singular theoretical framework, the inductive approach allowed for several streams of theory to be explored outside of the constraints of a singular approach. Importantly, the lack of constriction enabled the findings to be explored from an interdisciplinary approach as a means to explore how multiple disciplines may benefit from the research findings.

During stage four and five, the core themes and subthemes were identified. An example of how the themes were derived from numerous codes is illustrated in Appendix Eight and Nine. As the data explored highlighted several areas of consideration, the process of narrowing these themes was guided by the research questions. The transcripts and exploratory notes were reviewed for connections, reaffirming the priority of the themes and then redefining the subordinate themes for continuity. The themes that were not present in more than nine transcripts were grouped together for further but less in-depth analysis. Through this process, it felt that there were aspects of the data that could not be adequately explored within the constraints of this research study. Therefore, the final stage of the analysis process involved the selection of specific examples to illustrate elements of the themes that arose, while also recommending further lines in enquiry.

Phases of Thematic Analysis	
Phase	Process
One: Becoming familiar with the data	Listened to the recording; transcribed the data; read the data; noted ideas, re-read the data
Two: Generating initial codes	Codes that presented the most often were noted in level of importance; the codes were firstly divided among each specific discipline; then further divided into descriptive, theoretical, and linguistic codes as way to contain the large amount of data being explored; developed a set of potential themes

Three: Searching for patterns and themes	Utilised both Nvivo and the paper transcripts in order to compare the emerging themes while focusing on developing a hierarchy amongst the data; categorized and explored any repetitive themes further. Engaged with supervisors of the study to discuss bias and emerging themes.
Four: Reviewing Themes	Compared the data against the chosen theme; identified common links, subordinate themes, and repetitive themes; developed a thematic mapping of the themes and sub-themes
Five: Defining Themes	Refined the thematic map to address any presenting hierarchies in the data; narrowed the themes to capture and explore the potential theoretical connections that was presented in the data
Six: Analysis	A selection of extracts that spoke to the more prevalent themes were identified; the themes then were reviewed for connections in order to reaffirm the priority of the themes; subordinate themes were redefined for continuity; the extracts were analysed against the research questions

Table 5: Phases of Thematic Analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006

3.10.2 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

In eleven of the fifteen included interviews, the three stages of analysis advocated by IPA researchers was possible due to the depth of exploration around experiences and meanings provided by the participants (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). While the initial stage of analysis followed processes similar to TA, the 'secondary analysis' and the final step of 'interpretation through conversation' utilised the structure provided by IPA (Smith, 2004; Larkin, Watts, Clifton, 2006). This process allowed for deeper meanings and insights to be explored from both the perspective of the researcher and the participant as a secondary analysis was possible (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009).

The literature highlights that steps taken to undertake IPA research can vary from four to six steps, depending on the type of research and the sample size. For the purposes of this research, six steps were utilised in order to inductively approach the

research data (Smith, 2004; Larkin, Watts, Clifton, 2006). The initial stage of the research included a line by line analysis which focused on the experiential claims and understandings brought by the participants. Each interview was listened to prior to beginning the transcription process. Following this, the interview was transcribed and then put aside to avoid saturation. The audio was listened to a final time before moving onto the next stage. This process included the initial coding of themes, although this process was more intuitive at this stage rather than concrete and organised. During this initial stage, a structure was developed and common links were prioritised by similar, subordinate, and repetitive themes as a means to contain the large amount of data that was being explored. Within the process, the nuances and commonalities of the first five interviews were addressed as advocated in the literature as a means to build confidence and a framework for the remaining interviews (Larkin, Watts, Clifton, 2006). The data was then divided by its' potential discipline; then further divided into descriptive, theoretical, and linguistic areas in order to explore the descriptions of experiences, the language used around these experiences (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009).

Following these initial two stages, the data was returned to in order to identify any spoken and unspoken 'dialogue' that was occurring between the participants and the researcher. Both the NVivo (NVivo-7, 2019) software and the paper transcripts were utilised in order to compare any emerging themes that were arising as well as keep the context, researcher insights and concepts organised. During this stage, the data, the themes and the exploratory comments were explored in tandem to reflect on any insights that were deriving from the data. Further, additional codes were identified as a means to understand how the codes were aligning with the psychological knowledge held by the researcher (Smith, 2004). The analysis process drifted between stages one and three for the initial interviews as a means to understand how the participants might understanding the 'meaning' they assigned to their lived experiences and how these meanings were explored within the context of the interview process. Through this interpretative process, the relationships that existed between the varied events and the themes started to emerge. The fourth stage of the analysis process involved organising the initial codes that emerged from the data, the codes that were developed through the thematic process, and the reflections explored by the researcher (Smith, 2004).

The skill of reading and interpreting the data through the theoretical lens, known as 'analytic sensibility', was utilised, alongside the process of bracketing in order to

organise the researchers' insights during the interview process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process allowed for any descriptive meanings that were being assigned by the participants to certain life events to be explored later on. Importantly, this process also allowed for patterns that lent to wider psychological, social, or theoretical concerns to emerge outside of the interview process. The process of creating the margins, referred to as 'bracketing' was essential when exploring how language informed the study (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). This process allowed for the researcher to identify and detach from existing biases that were being experienced by both the participants and researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the process allowed for the data to be free from any verbal interruptions when any internal unspoken commentary occurred while exploring the more challenging data around sexual abuse and sexual violence (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009).

The process of bracketing occurred during each of the interviews, and immediately following the interview in order to ensure the richness around my own reflectiveness could be captured. Although exploratory in nature at the time, these insights helped inform the bracketing process that occurred in the analysis stage (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). The descriptive comments made throughout two of the interviews were focused on gaining insight into the language used by the participants, and as reminders to look up the literal definitions of the colloquialisms not understood at the time. When appropriate, the stages utilised by IPA allowed for a structured approach to understanding the meanings and sense making that were explicitly identified and descriptively explored by the participants (See: Table Six). The structural descriptions provided a context for 'how' each life stage was experienced and the textural descriptions provided a context for 'what' was experienced by the participants (Smith, 2004).

The fifth stage involved the utilisation of supervisor and peer reflection as a means to 'fact check' the interpretations that were forming the narrative of the research. As a means to engage in peer reflection, a student IPA research group was attended monthly where the reflective journals were discussed as well as the research analysis process as advocated in the literature (Smith, 2004). The sixth stage involved collating the data to develop a narrative that spoke to the participants' experiences and the meaning they assigned to these experiences. The remaining transcripts were analysed using stages one to six following the initial five interviews. Each interview and

transcript were approached in a way that allowed for the themes presented to develop independently. A further breakdown of the identified themes is provided in Appendix Ten.

Stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis		
Stages	Actions	Reflection process
One: Listening, Reading and Re-reading	Each interview was listened to prior to beginning the transcription process. Following this, the interview was transcribed and then put aside to avoid saturation. The audio was listened to a final time before moving onto the next stage.	Reflections and notes were collated and bracketed in order to make note of every nuance that may have been lost in the written transcription.
Two: Exploring and Commenting	The transcript was explored with the aim of capturing subjects that were discussed with a perceived higher level of importance and explorations into meaning began. The data was then divided by its' potential discipline; then further divided into descriptive, theoretical, and linguistic areas in order to explore the descriptions of experiences, the language used around these experiences	Reflections were focused on exploring the rationale for the written comments within the field notes. The exploration of bias and transference arose.
Three: Developing Emergent Themes	Utilised both NVivo and the paper transcript in order to compare any emerging themes while focusing on developing a hierarchy amongst the data. The data, the themes and the exploratory comments were explored in tandem to reflect on any insights that were deriving from the data	Reflections between the written notes taken in interview and taken while transcribing were compared in order to identify and commonalities.

Four: Searching for Connections	Structure was developed, common links were prioritised by similar, subordinate, and repetitive themes. Following this the themes were explored through the concepts of abstraction, subsumption, numeration, and function.	Reflections around the difficulty in analysing data from a non - pluralistic approach arose and issues of transference were noted as impactful.
Five: Moving on	The transcripts and exploratory notes were reviewed for connections, reaffirming the priority of the themes and then redefining the subordinate themes for continuity. Reflective journals and supervisor were utilised to confirm the building narrative provided by the participants.	Reflections on the presentation of data arose especially with regard to the presentation of data that highlighted the victim to offender pathway
Six: Identifying Patterns	The remaining transcripts were analysed using stages 1-6. Each interview and transcript was approached in a way that allowed for the themes presented to develop independently.	Reflections on the presentation of data through the lens of each discipline were noted as difficult to align with a single phenomenon. As were reflections around the 'right' data to use

Table 6: Stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis adapted from Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009

3.11 Learning from Pluralistic Enquiry

As the aim of the research was to explore the data beyond a semantic level, IPA allowed for the participants lived experiences to be explored beyond the verbatim where meanings could be explored (Creswell, and Creswell, 2017; Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). This methodology allowed for the primary focus of the research process to be on a participant's worldview and how they make sense of their personal and social environments (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). The process of exploring how the

veterans ascribed meaning to key interactions within their environment, their experiences of the CJS and their experiences of transitioning through several life stages uncovered a richness of data that shined a light on several of the intersections of experiences that led to their offending (Griffin et. al, 2012). This line of inquiry allowed for both the participants and the researcher to interpret their experiences together while giving space for the researcher to amend the line in inquiring when necessary (Bryman, 2008). Outside of this type of research, the complexities and subtleties around military lives may have been missed. However, research requires the ability to engage with what is presented during the analysis stage, rather than to continue to seek out or force data to arise, as a means to justify our own assumptions and aims (Willig, 2013).

There was an incorrect assumption on my part that the participants were actively engaged in their world and may have had some experience reflecting on their experiences in order to understand them (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). However, it became apparent after the sixth interview that some of the participants were unable to access the language needed to fully engage with the process due to the complex presentation of feelings and associations that can derive from traumatic experiences (Straussner and Calnan, 2014). These limited experiences appeared to create a deficit in how the participants communicated their lived experiences and how they understood those experiences. Consequently, when the data began to vary greatly due to variations in literacy, education, mental health experience, combat experience and offending histories, a new approach needed to be developed as a means to ensure the research remained iterative. Working within the 'third paradigm' of a pragmatists' approach, the research study adopted a pluralistic approach which would allow for the participant sample size to remain intact, while allowing for the diverse types of data to be represented in an equitable way (Creswell, and Creswell, 2017).

As a result of the variant ways in which the data was presented by the participants, the utilisation of both IPA and TA allowed for an intricate, multifaceted and diverse understanding of the experiences of justice involved veterans to be produced (Frost and Nolas, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition to this, taking on this pragmatic approach allowed for the flexibility required as the data did not fit neatly within a specific methodology (Feilzer, 2010). This process allowed for all of the participants experiences to be explored with both equality and equity in mind (Murphy, 2006). To engage in the process of bracketing and constant reflexivity in collaboration

with the thematic analysis processes allowed for the richness of the data to be examined and represented with what was experienced as a level of authenticity that may not have otherwise possible (Yardley, 2000; Elliott, Chargualaf and Patterson, 2016). To utilise analytical pluralism allowed for the essence of each description to be joined as a combined entity and examined against the landscape of the literature (Moustakas, 1994).

3.12 Sensitivity, Rigour and Transparency

Sensitivity to the research process was approached through the extensive amount of literature that was explored as a means to understand the social and moral panic that surrounds veterans in the UK (Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019). Equally, when periods of interruption occurred, the literature was re-examined in order to ensure that the research subject was still relevant and in need of exploration. Further, the development of the research design and the implementation of the research was examined and scrutinised at several intervals by supervisors and colleagues within the criminal justice system as a means to ensure that the research was being approached with the right knowledge, motivation and intent (Yardley, 2000). Sensitivity to the interview process was established though my demonstration of thoughtfulness around the material presented by the participants, an understanding of the impact around the institutional setting of the study, and a conveyed knowledge of the theory and the literature that related to the experiences of the participants (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009, Yardley, 2000). Finally, sensitivity to the analysis process was ensured by engaging in fact checking throughout the analysis process as well as being supported when challenging interviews occurred. Equally, throughout the research process, a reflective journal has been kept to ensure transparency could occur when prompted.

Commitment and rigour were ensured through the continued development of the skills required when interviewing marginalized populations, such as offenders (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). For example, the initial interviews highlighted how a sense of vulnerability to sensitive subject could be presented by the participants, especially in regard to discussions around their childhood experiences. There was often a sense of protectiveness that was communicated, which meant being attuned to their body language and tone was important. As a counsellor, this skill was easy to engage with. However, as a researcher, I was less skilled and needed to ensure that I was not unknowingly engaging in skills taught over my clinical training (i.e. head nodding,

supportive body language or the provision of affirming comments). Over the course of the interviews, as a means to further develop my interview skills, I focused more on developing my ability to be present in the interview without taking notes. I also began to allow for time and silence to occur as a means of giving the participants the opportunity to explore their experiences at their own pace.

Research advocates for engaging with the topic under investigation for a prolonged period and through the selection of a sample that is appropriate to achieving the aims of the research (Yardley, 2000). Therefore, rigour was achieved through the development and implementation of a pilot study, which attempted to recruit family participants and justice involved veterans. Upon a lack of successful recruitment for that project, a new research design was developed that aimed to focus on one specific participant population. The project was therefore developed over an extended period of time, with instances of trial and error driving the development of the research. Further, the research was aimed at understanding the lived experiences of justice involved veterans, therefore, placing the research within the prison was appropriate to the aims of the research (Yardley, 2000).

Finally, transparency has been ensured through the presentation of a descriptive analysis process that aligns with both IPA and TA procedures, including the provision of reflective notes and insights contained within this chapter (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the principle of transparency has been ensured through the engagement with a constant process of reflexivity and the process of journaling outside of the thematic procedures. The final principle of impact and importance considers the contribution to the field (Yardley, 2000). To this end, I have included the considerations and the implications for clinical relevance and practice in the final chapter.

3.13 Measuring Qualitative Research

A challenge to replicating this research study lies in the complexities of the environment, of the participants' and of myself as a new researcher. Therefore, the data has been presented with a detailed audit trail to ensure that the richness of the data could be relatable, scrutinized and explored further when possible, as replicating qualitative research can be a challenge (Lincoln and Guba, 1994). Previously, the possibility of the research being explored within multiple disciplines and through the lens of multiple realities was explored, here I offer insights into just one of many possibilities.

As the study was informed from an interpretivist approach, a complex representation of the lives of the participants was allowed to develop. It was small nuances, gestures and minor deviations from the interview schedule that allowed for the participants to open up and discuss experiences that can go unexplored when following a more directive approach (Carson *et al.,* 2001). The interactions that were had between the participants and myself were influenced by each other and therefore, I often chose to let the interviews follow a natural path of discussion when appropriate (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Lincoln and Guba, 1994; Pham, 2018). Due to the nature of the research environment, this flexible and personal research approach allowed the conversations to open up new understandings about the complex meanings, systems, and fixed realities that could have potentially been missed through a more dogmatic approach that focused on the research questions alone (Carson *et al*., 2001). As the recollection of a lived experience can be dependent on the individual, the environment and the type of interview, the subject of reliability, or trustworthiness was considered. As reliability and validity are terms more historically used to evaluate the value of research, the terms credibility, quality and trustworthiness have also been utilised to describe how the research process can be evaluated (Willig, 2013; Golafshani, 2003)

As trustworthiness was a concern in the early stages of the research process; notes, memo recording and bracketing were used to continually inform the research process, while allowing for biases and inconsistencies to arise and be challenged (Lincoln and Guba, 1994; Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013). Presenting findings and analytical thoughts to others, peers, supervisors, at conferences etc, is another way of ensuring the validity of the study, as others can challenge or ask those questions that get you thinking in new ways. Additionally, a constant review of the transcripts occurred, along with the review of the preliminary interpretations and reflections as a means to ensure the production of research was authentic to the ways in which the participants presented their lived experiences and insights. This process occurred at several intervals in order to ensure transparency in my procedures and analysis process (Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013).

3.13.1 Replicating the Research

In line with the principles advocated in the literature, the validity of the research was evaluated through several spheres in order to ensure the co-production of knowledge was authentic and reliable (Yardley, 2000). During the initial research stage,

the research questions were developed with the literature in mind and key search terms were organised through the use of Excel (Microsoft, 2019). Due to the amount of literature identified during the research process, the literature included in this thesis aims to provide an overview of some of the key literature that was found to be relevant during the initial write up period. The search strategy and research outcomes are noted in Chapter Two. The literature utilised was organised using Mendeley (Elsevier, 2019) and was divided into different folders that specifically represented an individual discipline. The development of the research interview schedule was based on the available literature at the time and can be viewed in Appendix Four.

During the analysis stage, the utilisation of both IPA and TA, meant that multiple theoretical perspectives were being examined, interpreted and applied to the data over the course of the analysis stages (Denzin, 2001; Patton, 1999). In anticipation for this experience, the participants were asked to validate my observations and interpretations when regional slang or jargon was used. In addition to this, I checked in with the participants about the notes I was taking during the interviews, as a means to ensure their lived experiences were being explored truthfully and equally in their eyes (Mays and Pope, 2000). This process allowed me to engage in each theoretical framework I was exploring with a feeling of trust around the data's completeness. As well as providing a sense of confidence that the research was aligning with my interpretations of the data. At several stages throughout the analysis process, the veteran's narratives and my reflections were reviewed in supervision to ensure blind spots were not being overlooked and the experiences of the participants were being represented with authenticity (Tuckett, 2005). By strengthening the research through engagement with each methodology in sequence, the research was able to be developed without constraint but presented cohesively and with purpose in mind (Mays and Pope, 2000).

However, ensuring complete validity and generalisability within qualitative research is not always possible as the production of research cannot always be free from potential bias's that can exist in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1994). However, by providing an audit trail of the methods, and providing a rich description of thought and analysis, others who undertake research with justice involved offenders may be able to align their findings to the findings presented within this thesis.

3.14 Co-construction of Language and Limitations

In several interviews, the veterans lacked the capacity to describe their experiences without the injection of my language or a reframing of the question posed. In many instances, this was the first time the veterans had spoken with an 'outsider' about their lives. Often the participants had little engagement with their own psychic process and denied that their lived experiences were anything other than 'normal' when prompted to explore what those experiences meant to them. When difficulties arose, it felt prudent not to interject language into the interview, although at times, I overstepped and offered alternative words to the questions in order to gauge their ability to interact with the question. This occurred infrequently, but upon analysis, was noted as a hindrance to the research as I should have allowed more silence into the room.

In cases where I did not offer alternatives, several participants chose to move to another question, rather than to sit in silence or to reflect further on the question at hand. When interviewing individuals with experiences of the criminal justice system, the process of leading an interview can disrupt the trust that has been built, as well as influence what information is being shared. Considering how offenders experience 'interrogations', it was important to allow the participants the power to guide the interview as to feel in control of the narration of the biographies (Baxter *et al.*, 2006). Reflectively, in future interviews, the focus will be on allowing the participants to use the language that best described their experiences, while ensuring I am better prepared with alternative questions prepared that do not appear leading.

3.14.1 Language as a means to Authenticity

When conducting interviews with participants from different regions of a large country, challenges can arise in the interpretation stage (Fryer, 2019). I had not anticipated how impactful my accent, my nationality and my lack of knowledge of all the cultural colloquialisms would be within the context of conducting research. During the interviews, several Scottish dialects were used by the participants', and I was not able to decipher the meanings of several words without clarification by the participants. During these occasions, the interview was redirected towards clarification rather than having a focus on the subject being discussed. Although I engaged in note taking and made question marks and reminders for myself, at times, the participants could tell that I was not familiar with their language and redirected without my prompt. As this was an

unanticipated experience, I was unprepared for how impactful these redirections would be on the final production of data.

Additionally, the way in which the participants willingly shared their experiences had me wondering whether it was the notion of the geographical distance or the cultural distance that allowed the participants to speak so freely at times. Equally, I must also consider whether my sharing my military background in four interviews elicited a sense of belonging that contributed to the participants' willingness to share in the ways they had. By sharing my background of the military, I could have introduced a familiarity that could be seen an either a hindrance or benefit to the interviews. However, there were several instances where the use of military terminology furthered the conversation. I was guided by my own learning and engagement style during these times, which research has found can encourage authentic results when conducting research with vulnerable populations (Snowden, 2013). However, it is unknown how much was not said because of this type of injection of my personal experiences.

Equally impactful was the participants' use of banter and side stories as a form of redirection away from the research questions. It was often the case that conversations were had outside of what could be described as 'aligning with the research question' as discussions about my nationality arose, my personal circumstances and their sexual orientation arose with a high frequency. At the time, it felt as though the interview was able to be redirected without confrontation due the nature of the relationships that had been built. However, when analysing the data, I noted several instances where I could not confirm that the participants were not being influenced by these conversations. This brought up the key questions about whether or not the information being generated could be assumed factual in relation to the participants' formal offending history or was the result a co-constructed narrative between myself and the participant as they wanted to be seen (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As the participants in the study were free to construct their own realities and narrative, the knowledge obtained has been considered at all times to be true (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As such, each interview was approached with flexibility and authenticity, which is also how the analysis process was conducted (Ricoeur, 1970). Through this approach, I was able to establish an open form of communication with the participants that often allowed for the conversation to be guided back to the interview schedule without feeling as though I was exploiting my

position of power or leading the interview (Karnieli-Miller *et al*., 2009, Braun and Clarke, 2006).

As issues with power were present due to the very nature of the interview process and the physical location of the interviews, there was an ongoing commitment to having an open dialogue and a respectable level of transparency when possible. This process helped develop and protect a sense of trust and respect from the participants. Equally as important was the subject of power and freedom of expression during the interview process. As such conversations about disclosures and the use of informal language was prompted in the first few minutes of the interviews, as a way to lessen the perceived state of power in the room (Karnieli-Miller *et al*., 2009). On several occasions, this process facilitated the expression of unguarded and candid data with a use of language that was less formal and more aligned with a conversation rather than an interview. However, that is not to say that this type of conversation did not sway or manipulate the outcome of the data, as I could have unintentionally been facilitating a more informal dynamic then would have been possible had I been more formal in my presentation of tone and presentation of the research questions.

3.15 Quality Assurance

As explored in both the Chapter Two and within this chapter, quality research must stand up to scrutiny in order to ensure that the standards of excellence within qualitative research remain (Tracey, 2010). The methodological innovation that has occurred throughout the use of a pluralistic methodology has allowed for the research to be authentic, meaningful and practical. The outcome of the study, explored further on the thesis, highlights how much is still unknown about the veteran population, even more so for incarcerated veterans. Further, conducting the research in this way has provided the indication that there are practices within military service that do not necessarily support their personnel to the best of the capabilities. The implications for conducting this research are evident in the fact that I now know that there is no returning to my clinical position without having another 'layer' of researcher fully embedded in my psyche. I have gained a robust knowledge of how research is obtained and the impact that qualitative research can have on individuals' lives. Finally, I have become acutely aware of how essential it is to utilise qualitative research to inform policy and best practice. Table Seven below highlights how this research study has aligned itself with the 'Big Tent' criteria as a means to ensure that the research is

worthy of exploration, credible, ethical and a meaningful contribution to the field of study (Tracey, 2010).

Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research

Criteria for quality	Via: means, practices, and methods	How the measure of quality applies to this study
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting	The topics of the research are worthy: • Hidden population, implicit depths of personal and social harm • Continued moral panic and fears around 'damaged' veterans • Timely due to the increase of UK veterans over the next 20 years • Timely: Renewed policy interest in veterans: e.g. MoD and OVA review launched in 2023
Rich rigor	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes	• Underpinned by several theoretical constructs, clear rationale provided • Years taken to reach and gather evidence with this vulnerable population • Larger sample for qualitative study, necessary for rigour in utilising pluralistic methods • Considerable analytical comparison and cross checking, considerable reflexivity in co-construction of data
Sincerity	The study is characterized by • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges	This study is characterized by • Having self-reflective and inclusive research that addresses the importance of terms such as 'offender' vs 'justice involved' • Having strong methodological and theoretical considerations explored
Credibility	The research is marked by • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflections	• Extensive descriptions of all methodological decisions and processes in Chapter 3, • Researcher reflections of practice and responsibilities of analysis and authorship revealed in Chapter 3 • Procedures for member reflections within interviews explained, but post-interview limitations due to sample must be recognised.
Resonance	The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations • Transferable findings	• Honest reflections of novice researcher should connect to other novices, as well as established researchers; having theses electronically accessible means this can be extensive. • The extent of methodological detail, ensures findings are transferable to other research • The biographical and holistic understanding of these lives provides relevance for wider audiences regarding social justice and inequality.
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically	• Biographical and pluralistic study offers a significant contribution to extant understandings of transitions, primarily but not exclusively related to military service. • Ambitious and innovate design is not only rationale, but examined for its potential in the research field • The need to examine the experiences of this under-researched and overlooked population is made clear throughout. • Relevance for variety of policy and welfare provision is explicit.
Ethical	The research considers • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)	• Extensive description of procedural ethics provided • Important illustrative examples of situational and relational ethics provided with in-depth reflection of positionality of the researcher.
Meaningful coherence	The study • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other	The study • The thesis has been crafted over the years of the doctoral training, and with extensive critical review and guidance from a range of expertise to ensure coherence.

Table 7: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research: Source: Tracy, 2010.

3.16 Reflexivity and Transparency

Research that discusses the challenges of qualitative research advocates for transparency and reflexivity as a means of exploring how bias and personal view points can influence the data (Willig, 2013). As a means to stay accountable to my experiences as a researcher engaged with potentially harmful data, a reflective journal was kept from

the recruitment process onwards. In addition to this, a counsellor, as previously mentioned was utilised following the fifth interview. This process helped me to address any possible transference or bias deriving from the interviews where extreme amounts of sexual violence or murder were discussed. Additionally, bi-weekly research supervision was held in order to discuss any issues that arose during the research process.

Further, as transparency is a cornerstone of self-reflectivity and understanding ones' own perspective, I have included extracts from my reflective journal in order to support the reader with an understanding of my feelings and interactions with the research at the time (See: Figure Eighteen). In hindsight, I would advocate for a more structured approach to the journal process so that reflections from the data collection stages could have been more defined rather than emotional.

Today was an overwhelming day. The officers allowed me to continue with the interview after we had been held in lockdown for over an hour, and the participant was very kind as I apologised to him for being late. He was very kind again but instantly I felt uneasy. His eyes shot up and his posture changed when I walked in and spoke. He perked up as he heard my American accent. He said he was 'very excited' to be talking to an American lady which I was instantly worried about.. His eyes were unable to focus throughout several of the questions and he got off topic wanting to discuss football, cheerleaders and why men like cheerleaders (as if he did not tell me five times, it was because of their breasts). I felt as though this was his way of imposing his masculinity onto me. He emphasised that he was a straight and an available male. I try to stray away from power positions within interviews but he was being so adamant that we were going to talk about anything other than his lived experiences that I had to remind him that I was here to talk about him and his family. I knew the interview was going to be hindered by this. He was flippant about his military history, his family experiences, he downplayed the experience of him grooming a child throughout the interview and casually threw in his rape charge, stating it was unwarranted and he was the victim. It has been a tough day. I am not sure if I should be writing these type of reflections but ok.

Figure 18: Reflective Excerpt

3.17 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research design process from the initial pilot study stages through to completion of the study. The use of analytical pluralism has been advocated for as a means to explore multiple types of data with an equal level of respect, depth and rigour. Within this research study, it was not always possible to for the participants to access the meaning they ascribed to situations in their lives safely due to a lack of informal and formal support (i.e. counselling) following the interviews. Therefore, the use of Thematic Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis allowed for the meanings that were uncovered and explored to be addressed, while giving equal space to the findings that were less explorative in nature. Given the outcome of the research, this methodology would be advocated for in the future. Although potentially with a less complex participant population, a more experienced researcher, and a smaller participant cohort. All of the lessons learned from the research design have been invaluable to the learning that has been achieved throughout this process. Equally, the research has highlighted how valuable all voices are to the discovery of new knowledge.

Chapter Four: Findings Chapter One

4.1 Introduction

The findings have been separated into three chapters, each providing insight across a particular stage of the participants' life history. Given the biographical nature of the enquiry, a chronological order seems appropriate as well as logical. This first findings chapter begins with an abridged biographical profile of the participants, and a mapping of the themes that have emerged as significant across the life course. The chapter follows with the findings that relate to the participants' childhoods through to their early experiences in the military. The second findings chapter explores the participants' life in the military and their subsequent transition from military to civilian life. Finally, the third chapter examines the participants' experiences of incarceration and ways in which the military could better support justice involved veterans from the participants' standpoint.

The findings presented within each chapter are a representation of a few key moments in the participants' life histories. The process of determining the 'correct' quotes with a precision that aligns with the research was challenging in that so many of the participants echoed similar insights through the use of very different words. Therefore, every effort has been made to explore the essence and meaning of the participants experiences through a collective lens.

4.1.1 Introduction to the Participants

As would be expected in qualitative enquiry, the level of exploration of life events and the feelings and meanings assigned to these insights varied between participants. However, every attempt has been made to ensure each of the participants are adequately represented in these chapters. Verbatim extracts from interviews have been used to where appropriate to ensure that participants authentic voices are heard. The use of ''…'' has been used to exclude irrelevant prose where appropriate, […] are used where I have inserted text to help make sense of the statement due to missing detail. The aim of these descriptions is to not alter the meaning of the participants words but to give context where jargon or context specific (i.e. military slang) has been used.

To further support the reader in gaining insight into each individuals' lived experiences throughout their life stages, pen portraits have been created and illustrated in Appendix Two. The aim of the pen portraits is to give a brief snapshot into the

participants prior to the exploring specific lived experiences and insights. Equally, as a large amount of data was collected from each participant, the use of pen portraits has allowed an overview of each individuals lived experiences to be provided in a condensed manner (Sheard and Marsh, 2019). For a brief snap shot of the participants lives see Table Eight below. The men have been given pseudonyms and aspects of their service history have been omitted in order to retain confidentiality.

Themes in Action	Code Name	Life history Descriptors
"My trauma is what led me here" *Psychic wounds unhealed*	Jeffrey	Boy soldier; trauma in childhood; PTSD related symptoms due to trauma while in service; no family support; sexual offences
"I just kept on doing what I did before I got in" *In for the fight*	Stephen	Boy Soldier; youth offending; experienced combat trauma; got discharged intentionally; violence related offences
"They bullied me all of the time and I had no one" *Grin and bear it*	Will	Boy Soldier; youth offending; drank heavily while in service; violence and dangerous driving charges first; no family support; sexual offences against a child
"The media blamed my PTSD and not me" *Erratic Institutions*	Eric	Boy Soldier; ACE's; combat lead to PTSD; no contact with family after offence; kidnapping; sexual offences against a child and adult, murder
"I thought the drug money was better than military money" *The path regretted*	Matt	Youth offending; drinking and fighting while in service; went straight from training to combat; PTSD symptoms but no diagnosis; contact with both children and family; drug related offences
"My family could not handle who I was before I went in or after" *Family ties*	Jim	Boy Soldier; youth offending; negative education experiences; chose football over military life; no contact with children/family; drug and violence related offending
"Going 'Awol' was my only choice if I didn't marry my pregnant girlfriend" *The path regretted*	Lewis	Boy Soldier; ACE's ; youth offending; military prison to discharge; no contact with children/family; drug and domestic violence related charges
"My wife said you leave the military or I'll leave you" *Family ties*	Keith	Boy Soldier; ACE's ; negative education experiences; little family support prior; sexual offences against children
"Even getting sectioned didn't get me the help I needed" *Erratic Institutions*	Sean	Boy Soldier; trauma in childhood; combat related PTSD; went to military prison; then was sectioned; discharged for drugs; sexual offences against children
"I chose to hit my CO and go home" *Unprepared for the fight*	James	Boy Soldier; ACE's; youth offending in childhood; combat related PTSD; no contact with children/family; kidnapping and sexual offences
"I saw too many people die and did not deserve to ask for help" *Psychic wounds unhealed*	Dan	Involved with military cadets first; ACE's; Boy Soldier; combat related PTSD; went 'Awol'; was exploited by partner while on disability; sexual offences against a child
"I went to Uni, got a job, but I could not keep it straight" *The path regretted*	Richard	Youth offending; ACE's; raised by extended family; fighting while in service led to discharge; had twelve years between service and offending; sexual offences against children
"The military left me once they learned of my charge" *Erratic Institutions*	Chris	Trauma in childhood; no family support while in service and prior to offending; sexual offences against children; production of illegal images
"The military did not even help me, even though they kept me in" *Erratic Institutions*	Nick	Boy Soldier; ACE's; youth offending; joined to stop; sent to Combat; arrested on return due to an unknown civilian charge; no support during this time; combat related PTSD; no contact with children/family; consistent reoffending; violence and drug related charges
"I tried to escape the family in my family and went straight to violence in the military" *Families ties*	Max	Boy Soldier; ACE's; sent straight to combat; experienced bullying; served in military prison for violence against a CO; no contact with children/ family; sexual offences

Table 8: A brief snapshot of the participant shared experiences

4.2 Thematic Overview

While the themes are reported as being separate entities to consider, there is considerable intersection among them (See: Figure Nineteen)
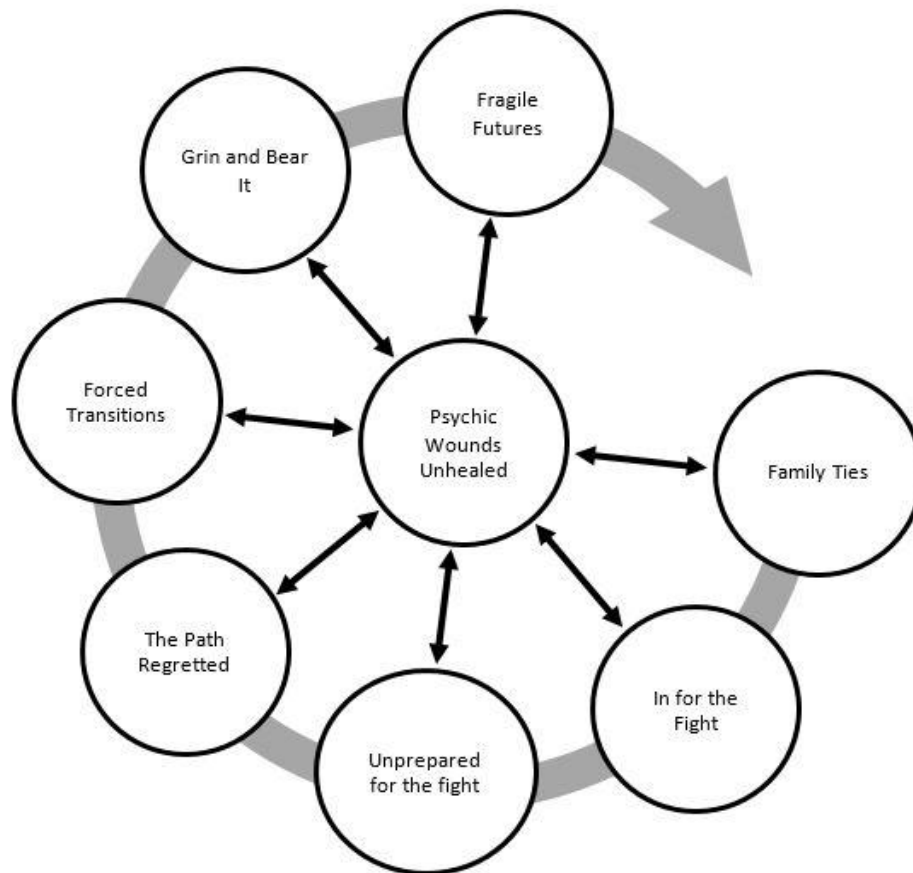

Figure 19: Thematic Overview of Findings

Having presented a brief overview of the participants in this research, and of the themes identified throughout their life course, the remaining aspects of the chapter will consider the thematic findings that emerges as significant from the participants early lives, through to their adolescence/early adulthood. The chapter concludes with the participants' journeys into the military and their early experiences therein.

4.3 Family Ties

The following section explores the early relationships deemed meaningful and influential in their early life stages. Importantly, narrations of families rarely included stories of well- adjusted or supportive experiences. Equally, families were often referred to when discussions of abuse, trauma and social isolation arose. As such, families are explored as a means to understand how early life experiences can serve as motivators to

military enlistment. The following section will explore the participants' experiences through the three following subthemes: *Acting alone, Parentification and Beyond ACEs: Trauma in Childhood.*

4.3.1 Acting Alone

Of the fifteen participants, one participant cited being raised within a 'traditional' home setting with both parents present. Twelve of the participants cited being raised by extended family members or within single parent households after instances of parental abandonment or incarceration. The remaining two participants reported the majority of their childhood experiences to have involved long periods within the care system, although early childhood experiences with their biological families were noted. Indeed, families were often cited as being both positive and negative influences in the participants' lives. Further, family was cited as being contributory to feelings of confusion and mistrust throughout some of the participants' early life stages, leaving several participants without a feeling of psychological safety in their early childhoods.

Importantly, more than half of the participant population cited what appeared to be a lack of psychological safety and feelings of self-reliance and abandonment from the age of five onwards. In addition to this, maternal relationships were deemed the most influential throughout the participants' lives. For Lewis, the requirement to be self-reliant began at the age of eight due to his mothers' poor mental health and reported addiction to opioids:

> She's not a very sane person…it's always been me that's had to look after my mum when I was old enough. (Lewis)

For Eric, the loss of his relationship with his mother at the age of thirteen was noted as significant when discussing a lack of psychological safety within his family unit:

> I'd always been really close to my mum…and that day came and I was just chucked out…I don't know where my mum went. I don't know because of lost contact with her. (Eric)

The loss that came from his mothers' actions (i.e. his family home and his school placement) appeared to influence how Eric explored his interpersonal relationships and the experiences he had since this period. Across the life course, he recounted feelings of mistrust and loss as a result of his entire families' reaction to his mother leaving. Several participants similarly highlighted the lack of positive maternal experiences

during their childhoods as contributory to feelings of self-reliance, isolation and abandonment:

> My biological mum drank when she was pregnant with me… she [adopted mum] thought there was always something wrong with me. (Jeffrey)

> I can say my mum is never my supporter. She's never really been a mother. My mum is more like my sister. (Lewis)

> It's kind of like I created my own path, I've made my own mistakes. I kind of just made my own since I was about fourteen. (Nick)

Research highlights how a lack of a positive maternal bond in the early developmental stages can negatively influence the development of a healthy self-esteem, while also negatively influencing feelings of safe attachment to those in positions of trust (See: Howard and Gamble, 2011; O'Neill, Kuhlmeier and Craig, 2019).

Although Keith cited a positive view towards his mother throughout the interview, it appeared as though the dynamic between his parents contributed to a lack of psychological safety throughout his childhood as illustrated below:

> It was literally like my mum who's getting me into trouble and that, whereas my dad was "What you doing this, what you doing that for?"…I never had a sense of what was what. (Keith)

> For eight of the participants, sudden disruptions in their home lives, loss of trust in paternal relationships and abuse were cited as negatively contributing to how they viewed those who were in positions of power throughout their childhoods:

> There's a man on the couch and I was like 'who's this?' They said 'oh it's your dad, you're going to stay with him'… It was horrible. (Lewis)

For Max, periods of bullying were experienced throughout his childhood which led to instances of offending as a means to protect and provide for himself:

> It's my dad who purposefully made me wear horrible shit to school…I was getting bullied because of the stuff I was wearing at the school so I had to sell drugs to make money so I could change on my way to school… it was horrific. (Max)

Further, for some of the participants, the early hyper masculine archetypes placed upon their paternal role models contributed to negative feelings of self-worth and loss that remained in the present narrations of childhood:

> I was trying to hold on to my dad because obviously you want an alpha male in your life … He never had any good priorities in life, like for me for starters. (Nick)

Within these narrations, several of the participants cite experiences with their male role models as 'horrible'. However, they stopped short of exploring how these experiences could have contributed or influenced their current positions as offending. Equally, where negative experiences of paternal role models (i.e. fathers, step fathers, and grandfathers), was cited, it appeared as though these experiences were discussed through the lens of understanding the impact of physical violence, rather than emotional abuse or neglect. As such, where the participants discussed their male role models, they explored feelings related to periods of domestic violence and bullying with a higher priority. Whereas explorations of maternal experiences included more psychological reflections about the impact to the participants' low sense of self, feelings of abandonment and feelings of loss with a stronger sense of reflectivity about the impact of these experiences.

Research that explores how families are influential in how an individual develops, highlights how the lack of positive family experiences can hinder how an individual develops psychosocially. This can leave an individual vulnerable to poor self-esteem and feelings of isolation from the collective in which they belong (See: Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008; Sokol, 2009). Ultimately, prolonged periods of neglect and a lack of psychological safety contributed to several of the participants lacking self –esteem and feelings of belonging. Reflecting on their childhoods from the context of incarceration, several participants cited the psychological impact of parents' or parental figures' abuse and abandonment as a key contributors to their path towards offending:

> My aunt raised me and she always said I was always a troublesome child… but I never knew why and I never got services…I was alone (Jeffrey)

Although negative experiences involving paternal relationships were equally as influential in the development of feelings of mistrust and abandonment, it was apparent that the betrayal experienced by many of the participants' maternal figures was extremely influential to their decisions to leave home at a young age. As such, where the participants cited negative experiences with their maternal role models (i.e. mothers, aunts, grandmothers), it appeared as though there was an inability to form relationships throughout their life. Potentially contributing to the high prevalence of sexual offending amongst this participant group. Although it is important to note that none of the participants made direct links between their dysfunctional relationships with their

maternal role models and their sexual offending, their inability to view any relationships with women as stable or nurturing could have contributed to their propensity to engage in this type of offending. Whereas the participants who were involved in violence or drug related offences were less likely to report negative experiences with maternal role models.

4.3.2 Parentification

Several participants in this study were left to develop their identities in isolation, without a supportive environment to challenge any developing distorted or dysfunctional views during key developmental stages. In several instances, the participants offered significant insight into the psychological impact of not having positive parental figures in their early childhoods:

> My mum and dad…they were detrimental in my life…they were a cancer, they should've been cut out when I was sixteen, they should never went anywhere near me. I was just an inconvenience basically. (Max)

> I never competed for attention…I go to my aunties and stay with different aunties each weekend or something like that. (Chris)

Without the anchor provided by stable family relationships, the participants relayed the development of emotions of anger, loss and grief during their childhood and adolescence, which as research shows, can further explain the development of poor mental health, offending, and social isolation in some populations (See: Woodward and Frank, 1988; Puskar *et al.*, 2008; Chowdry, Crawford and Goodman, 2011).

In the circumstances outlined so far, participants in this study described being forced into the role of the provider or protector. This contributed to several of the participants feeling isolated and abandoned during their early childhoods:

> I'd had contact with my mum all the time though because she was heavily addicted to Valium…but then my mum went off and left him and I was left too. (Lewis).

For two of the participants, the need to 'provide' for their parents financially was felt as a further breach of trust or 'betrayal' which compounded feelings of discontentment towards their families:

> He (Father) stole my money…I would of gave him everything...at that time, it ruined our relationship to this day. (Lewis)

> Every time I phoned home she (mum) was so bubbly, I could hear my dad shouting "Donna, tell that boy to stop sending home his pay" my mums going "Do you know want to cut it down a bit son?'…but not meaning it (Keith)

The above narratives outline how 'parentification' practices (i.e. relying on the child for emotional or financial support, disclosing too much to children, or expecting childcare from older children) can isolate an individual, preventing them from developing meaningful relationships with both male and female role models throughout their adolescences and into adulthood. Such individuals become more vulnerable to periods of isolation and a feeling as though they don't belong amongst their families (Hurd, Zimmerman and Xue, 2009). Consequently, the experiences of parentification appeared to be a negative contributor to many of the participants' inability to form healthy attachments throughout their lives.

Importantly for this study, 'parentification' and dysfunctional parenting styles have been found to be contributors to offending, with sexual offending noted with a higher prevalence for individuals with these experiences (McKillop *et al.*, 2012; Mckillop *et al.*, 2018). Where a lack of warm feelings or admiration for paternal figures and a lack of affection from maternal figures is noted, the research highlights an increased vulnerability to sexual offending (Sigre-Leirós, Carvalho and Nobre, 2016). As the majority of participants reported a history of sexual offending, the relationships formed in their early childhoods and adolescent stages (or lack thereof) could have influenced their dysfunctional views on relationships and violence. For the participants in this study, the presence of 'positive' parental experiences was noted as negligible, with one participant citing positive viewpoints towards family.

For the majority of participants, a lack of positive family experiences was cited with consistency. However, for Will, the presence of extended family members was noted as a positive contributor to feeling as though periods of isolation and abandonment were temporary:

> My main influence was my grandma… She was basically the corner stone that I built my life back up from, she was the support, she was the one that was like 'you can do this.' (Will)

When conversations about 'good' childhoods developed, the participants often appeared conflicted in their narrations, as many of the participants appeared to recognise that these coincided with stories of abuse and neglect. As illustrated by Nick below, complex family experiences can muddle an individuals' view of their life history:

> My mum she's brilliant…one day, my mum came and said 'your dads not your dad', so that was pretty harsh…after that I got lost and started getting into trouble. (Nick)

By citing many of the difficult early childhood experiences as 'normal', the participants highlight how families can influence the development of identity and shape the path towards offending through the embedding of distorted attitudes and narratives. Many of the participants appeared to view experiences of abuse, abandonment and mistreatment as 'par for the course'. Arguably, the potential to normalise trauma and abuse was heightened for many of the participants (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986), and set in at an early age. Consequently, many of the participants cited their experiences in childhood as potentially contributory to periods of offending but would not go so far as to fully blame them for their subsequent offending.

4.3.3   Beyond ACEs: Trauma in Childhood

The following section will explore those experiences that could be seen to extend beyond the formal view of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as a means to understand how these influenced participants' views of belonging, in the context of early relationships and how they developed the internal narratives that would influence later life decisions.

The majority of participants identified several instances where ACES overlapped with instances of trauma derived from within their families. Narratives around experiencing interfamilial violence, addiction, and mental health problems were present throughout nearly all the interviews. The difference between how ACEs are defined and how trauma is defined in childhood depend on several factors related to the frequency and severity of the events, the perception of the event by the victim and their psychological resilience prior to the event (See: NHS Scotland, 2018; Malvaso *et al.*, 2021). Of the fifteen participants, fourteen cited instances that would align with the formal definition of ACEs (Felitti *et al.*, 1998). It is worth noting that the one participant who identified their early childhood experiences as positive also cited instances of violence in the home as a means to enforce punishment for rule breaking.

Individually, the participants described instances of abandonment, physical abuse and neglect prior to the age of sixteen. However, many of the participants acknowledged violence but viewed these experiences as 'normal' and did not class these experiences as 'traumatic':

> There was a lot of domestic violence…we used to get beatings all the time. (Sean)

Given the compounded nature of the adverse experiences cited by several of the participants, it appeared as though many of the participants would meet much of the criteria for complex trauma or C-PTSD (Wamser-Nanney and Vandenberg, 2013). Although conversations around the presence of PTSD or symptoms that relate to such disorders was limited throughout the interview process, behaviours and feelings (i.e. sleeplessness, hypervigilance, poor emotional regulation, the presence of flashbacks) that could align with formal diagnostic processes were described throughout the majority of interviews.

For two participants, their experiences of childhood abuse included sexual abuse over an extended period of time. As illustrated by Sean and Chris, feelings of injustice and helplessness were commonly cited:

> It was me and my sisters who they [brother and father] did it to…I think he [dad] only did [was incarcerated] between three, five year…my brother the same. (Sean)

> Her [his father's mistress] son was sexually abusing me…[Dad] didn't know what was happening…I would have been probably seven or eight, it's been difficult to come to terms with. (Chris)

In the study, abuse of this nature emerged as one of the most significant and impactful ACES for participants. The perceived lack of resolution or justice following prolonged periods of abuse in childhood continued to resonate with participants at the time of interview, and epitomised the disruption and distress they experienced in childhood. Research that speaks to the higher prevalence of childhood sexual abuse in homes that report a presence of adversity is notable for the participants in this study as over half of the participant population cited numerous experiences of adversity throughout their life histories (Draucker *et al.*, 2011).

The presence of adversity and sexual abuse can impact an individual's view of family and relationships over their life course. While negatively recounting abuse, Sean also spoke about his loyalty to both his brother and his father following their release from prison:

> He's my brother, all he got done with me was [touching]…I still visited my dad…I don't hold no grudges. (Sean)

Research suggests that the impact of experiencing a pattern of both physical and sexual abuse, by individuals in positions of power and trust has been found to have a direct relationship with instances of offending in adulthood. As such, individuals develop

distorted views of trust, accountability, and social norms. For the majority of participants, the notion of loyalty was not addressed. However, it appeared that Sean's difficult life history contributed to a distorted view of loyalty which also influenced how he viewed his early childhood experiences:

> When I was young, I'd stay loyal to mum…we were getting moved between refuges…my dad always found my mum and we ran off but I was with her. (Sean)

Individuals with these life experiences are more vulnerable to distorted views of violence, poor mental health and addiction, which can further lead to instances of offending (de Jong *et al.*, 2015; Siegel and Williams, 2003; Widom and Ames, 1994). When instances of physical and sexual abuse were cited, the participants lacked a sense of reflective insight into any relationships that could exist between their difficult childhoods and their offending histories. As such, within these narrations, discussions around how these experiences impacted the participants view of themselves or their relationships were noticeably absent, in spite of how the experiences cited appeared to be influential in their trajectory towards offending.

Although violence was cited by Sean and several of the other participants as an ACE, the nature and context of violence experienced appeared to influence how the participants viewed their early childhood experiences. For Will, the presence of violence was directly related to rule breaking and therefore was narrated with a sense of understanding:

> I scraped my car, and the police came…I was panicking because I've never been in trouble and my dad lost it with me, absolutely lost it, it was the first time he proper hit me. (Will)

This experience of violence was cited as a 'normal' part of his upbringing as his family were 'traditional' and therefore, acts of punishment were experienced differently than the remaining participants. Through this narration, Will's views on discipline and violence align with research that explores how experiencing this form of violence at a young age further leads to the view that violence is an acceptable form of protection, communication and resolution (Moylan *et al.*, 2010; Pingley, 2017). Similarly, participants expressed confused notions of gratitude for family members who did not engage in more severe forms of violence towards them in their early childhoods:

> She says "You're lucky, when I was younger… if you gave lip, you got the belt or the cane" and she continued to say "You're lucky we [mum] beat you differently now''. (Keith)

These forms of 'acceptable' violence generally were perpetrated by paternal figures, building on the narratives of maternal abandonment contrasted with paternal abuse cited in the previous section:

> My dad used to kick the fuck out of me all of the time, he was a horrible git… but I think that's more of an 80's thing, dads were quite tough. (Max)

> He [Dad] decided in his wisdom and through a large bottle of vodka that he was selling everything in the house for £25 … he grabbed her [mum] and he head-butted her. (Chris)

Within this context, violence appeared to be synonymous with masculinity and the paternal role. For the remaining thirteen participants who reported instances of violence the presence of violence in the home, while simultaneously accepted, elicited sentiments of changed and damaged identities:

> My dad…I did have a couple of beatings off him… it changed us. (George)

The consistent presence of violence resulted in feelings of isolation, anger, and vulnerability throughout the participants' key developmental stages. These findings align with previous research that highlights how influential violence can be to an individual's identity development and feelings of isolation later in life (Moyan *et al.,* 2010).

As further illustrated by Keith and Nick, the violence experienced in childhood contributed to various retaliatory behaviours in schools which ultimately led to their life trajectories changing:

> I was getting beat at home…then I ended up beating that boy and ended up getting suspended (Keith)

> I started getting in trouble at school…they did not have the right to tell me what was wrong or right anymore [after his mother left]…then I got kicked out. (Nick)

Similarly, several of the participants reported engaging in harmful behaviours (i.e. fighting, drug taking, and drinking alcohol) in their early developmental stages, which is often explored in the research as a means to retaliate against difficult childhood experiences (Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day, 2017). This led to them engaging in cycles of offending, isolation and exclusion from education and social environments as a direct consequence of experiencing prolonged periods of violence throughout their childhoods. As such, the experiences of poor parental attachment and neglect are noted as contributory to the life trajectories of the participant population.

Family is highlighted in criminal justice research as having the potential to be a positive motivator towards desistance, the lack of stable and healthy family bonds being seen to inhibit this process (See: Blokland *et al.*, 2015; Walker *et al.*, 2017; Cid and Marti, 2012; Jardine, 2015). Overall, for this participant group, the primarily negative experiences described in early family life suggest that family does not serve this protective function in offending. Rather, ACES occurring in the context of the family appear to have contributed to further instances of offending for this participant population, as a response to parentification and violence.

4.4   In for the Fight

Against this backdrop of disrupted childhood and adolescent years, the theme *'In for the fight'* highlights the motivators for enlistment cited by the participants. Within this section, three sub themes capture important elements of that journey including hopelessness, a lack of educational opportunities and feelings of obligation engrained through multigenerational stories of military service. Important to the context of this research, twelve of the fifteen participants joined the military before the age of eighteen, with the majority joining at sixteen. Many reported viewing joining at this age as appropriate, due to the desire to continue the family legacy, gain access to employment and support their young families.

In addition to these motivators, experiences of adversity, poor educational attainment and youth offending enticed many of the participants into the military as a means of survival and/or to escape difficult home lives. Importantly, military life was also cited as providing many of the participants with the opportunity to redefine the identities developed in disrupted families, as several participants cited wanting to become a 'different' man through military enlistment. The following section will explore the participants' experiences through the following subthemes: *For Queen and Country, Nothing else* and *A wee bit of trouble*.

4.4.1   For Queen and Country

Many of the participants narrated their reasons for enlistment in a swift succession of serving their country, to gain employment or to escape home life. For many, the desire to display a national identity, prove their sense of 'patriotism' or continue the family tradition of military service was cited:

> I was in cadets from thirteen…my grandfathers, both grandfathers were in the military…he [paternal grandfather] was the main influence. (Dan)

> I had always wanted to join... the Army was in the family back as far back as everybody could remember. (Lewis)

> I always wanted to join the military when I was younger… my dad says, 'don't give up on my hopes'. (Keith)

As such, these motivations served as a main driver for joining the military at a young age, which replicates motivators for enlistment identified in the literature (See: Gibson and Abell, 2016; Taylor *et al.,* 2020).

Equally important, several of the participants viewed the military as an opportunity to build self-esteem, restore a sense of family pride or as a means to rebuild connections that had been lost through family breakdowns:

> I wanted to make my family proud, I wanted to make something of myself. (Jeffrey)

> I joined to prove my dad wrong…I've got a memory of them (father) saying that, "You'll never make to Paras," …that made me determined to prove him wrong. (Matt)

Within their reported views of the military, the social prestige, the family honour and the ability to leave difficult home lives was an influential contributor to their joining the military. As such, for the majority of the participants, being able to join the military was viewed as an opportunity to better themselves through the opportunities that the military could provide through its perceived social capital. Consequently, when the participants' military service ended under difficult circumstances, the loss of the social capital sought by the participants was hard felt, contributing to further feelings of isolation and loss.

4.4.2 Nothing Else

For thirteen of the participants, the military was seen as a 'provider' due to a perceived lack of education and employment opportunities in their hometowns as highlighted by Jeffrey and Will:

> To be fair there wasn't really any other option. (Jeffrey)

> [Dad] just said 'It's hard for everyone here', where I come from… so I thought yeah, let's give this [military service] a crack. (Will)

For many of the participants, it was the perception that only the military could provide for them that drove their motivation to enlist. For others, instances of both maternal abandonment and paternal parentification were cited as factors in the decisions to enlist

at a young age. As illustrated by Eric, his mother leaving and his father's difficulty with alcohol meant that he felt responsible for providing for the family financially:

> I joined to support my dad and that just because he needed me to keep going and stuff like that because he was an alcoholic. (Eric)

Importantly, poverty has been found to be a skew the decision-making skills in children and adolescence due to financial stress, malnutrition, and the impact of adversity and trauma on cognitive processing (Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea, 2017). Therefore, the participants may not have been competent enough at that age to determine whether military service was in the best interest of their futures as fear was a main driver in their enlistment.

Additionally, a lack of self-confidence in succeeding in spaces outside of the military was noted as a contributory factor to joining. Here, Stephen presents a picture of the internal challenges that he experienced in his youth that was echoed throughout several other interviews:

> I'd seen some of the others, better than me and they were struggling…so I just went and joined the army, started at fifteen and a half and joined at sixteen. (Stephen)

The relationship between poverty and poor self-esteem and mental health has been found to exist largely amongst populations that experience a higher frequency of adverse experiences, education attainment gaps, and poor access to services (Elliott, Chargualaf and Patterson, 2016). An example of the participants viewing themselves as 'other' or 'not good enough' highlights the ways in which young people experience a lack of opportunities, poor economic infrastructure and poor family support.

The view of being 'not good enough' is further emphasised where educational opportunities are limited due to instances of exclusion, poor access to educational support and limited opportunities for educational advancement:

> In the village I come from, that was the only option…I didn't really have very much grades…I had no qualifications to speak of. (George)

For over half of the participant population, limited educational opportunities was cited as contributory to difficulties in their pre-enlistment lives. Within the narrations of the participants, the education attainment gap that exists in Scotland appears to have influenced the participants' ability to develop a secure identity. Potentially, due to a lack of positive experiences belonging and self- acceptance in the second primary institution

they experienced, following the family (Couper and Mackie, 2016; Verhoeven, Poorthuis and Volman, 2019). Here Jeffrey illustrates how influential access to education across the life span can be to future employment and training opportunities:

> I failed the minimum IQ for the infantry, I had to go to the' dumb and dumber' courses … we got told it was a course for the spastics that can't pass the basic writing and education side of it. (Jeffrey)

Importantly, for some, the willingness to join the military stemmed from the inability to see a life without some form of incarceration if they had continued on their previous path of youth offending:

> I joined the army because I knew I was going to jail a lot...i thought then I won't get in trouble and that anymore, like I wanted better things of my life. (Nick)

> I was trying to change myself…because I was knew myself, I couldn't go back home…I've got to make pals here, and I've got to stay out of trouble. (Jim)

The findings point to internal conflicts that played out within several of the interviews, highlighting the complicated way in which the participants viewed their motivations for enlistment. These accounts suggests that participants joined as a way of affirming an identity instilled on them by their extended families, as well as a means to escape external and internal drivers. Equally, the participants seemed to join in direct defiance of the limitations placed on them by their geography, their childhood experiences and their immediate families.

The underlying representation of hopelessness and desperation that was echoed in the narratives of their early childhood seems to have been a significant factor in choices to enlist in military service at a young age for many of the participants. Further to this, experiences of poverty, isolation, and exclusion further compounded the challenges the participants were having at home, in their relationships, and in their community, leaving the military as their 'best bet'.

4.4.3 A Wee Bit of Trouble

Of the fourteen participants who reported engagement with youth offending prior to joining the military, two received formal charges in their pre-enlistment lives. The remaining participants cited experiences of being returned home, getting an informal warning or being socially shamed as a way to 'teach them a lesson', by local police officers not wanting to charge them officially after periods of offending. Youth offending was often recounted as common and inconsequential to their periods of

incarceration in adulthood by the majority of the participants. Rather, the participants viewed instances of violence and criminal damage as little more than 'getting into trouble', 'getting into mischief', and 'getting into a bit of bother' as highlighted here:

> I'd be in trouble on my nights out …nine times out of ten I'd be down at the police station. So when I was younger, I was probably the wee shit. (Jim)

> Just looking back on the many problems I had, fighting and getting in trouble with the police and that… I was never charged but I was taken to the cells and released by morning. (George)

Worthy of note, for one participant, a reflection was made about how the lack of accountability in childhood and in the early stages of military life contributed to further instances of offending in his later life stages:

> I was doing stuff that would get me in trouble but was never really caught for it. Since coming in here, I've reassessed a lot of my life…had I been caught earlier, maybe it would've curbed me and stopped me, but I didn't, especially when I was young. (Will)

Will highlights here that the institutional failures he experienced could have readdressed his experiences of youth offending. Importantly, research agrees in that the best way to support desistance in young people is through consistent consequences for delinquent behaviour as a means to encourage desistance and limit acts of future violence (World Health Organization, 2015). However, there was a lack of consequences to their actions cited throughout the interviews. Equally, as many of the participants cited a lack of formal involvement with the criminal justice system, there appeared to be a lack of reflection around their offences that may have occurred if they were held accountable for offending in their early childhoods:

> I used to get in to trouble…I've never really thought about it too much. It might have been just me or it might have been what was happening at home. (Eric)

For many of the participants, perpetrating acts of violence against other youths, engaging in gang related activities (i.e. vandalism, arson, and theft) and engaging in excessive drinking and drug taking were cited as a means to experience a sense of belonging:

> I always looks back on my old thirteen year old self. I looked like seventeen. They [local friends] would ask me to jump in and get the booze…just a bit of fun. (James)

> I was about seven…I'm going with older boys setting fires… fun until you set half your area on fire… I was in a lot of trouble as a kid, but just not police trouble. It should have been police trouble. (Lewis)

Further, as many of the participants grew up viewing violence as normal within their social environment, the willingness to engage in similar acts was not unlikely for them:

> My estate was dog eat dog, you had to fight when you were growing up…I was one of the boys running about beating them up all the time, basically getting myself into trouble. (Keith)

> Because I was like involved in gangs and like that, that's just the norm in Scotland… you do it one time [fight], the next time you're all fighting each other and all that, I was just young. (Stephen)

Indeed, studies have shown that viewing acts of violence in early developmental stages can instil a sense of comfortability with violence, as such acts are seen as a social norm that is standard and accepted across all social groups (Tankard and Paluck, 2016). However, the recollections of offending often were overshadowed by expressions of sadness around the reasons they had a history of youth offending:

> I was in trouble all the time…because I couldn't fight back with my dad so I just fought everybody else. I got beat up until I was about twelve, then learned I could fight. (Max)

These narrations align with research that suggests it is a lack of parental guidance and support that further increases the likelihood of future offending (Chowdry, Crawford and Goodman, 2011).

In isolation from the remaining participants, Keith notes how his father was a positive motivator towards his enlistment from a young age due to his offending:

> It's because my dad was saying to us, I can't go down that life, getting into trouble, fighting people…You got to buck up your ideas or you'll end up in prison (Keith)

Following this narration, the remaining insights about his father were presented with a positive tone, one in which he appeared proud to be discussing how this experience influenced his life. The way in which these experiences were recounted was in direct opposition from previous recollections around his relationship with his father. Once again, the notion of loyalty was raised by the participants in this regard, as previous narrations of abuse were instantly diminished in exchange for positive narrations of support. Although these experiences were limited, the relationship between Keith's experiences with his father in this regard was noted as influential to how he viewed his military career in its' entirety.

4.5   Unprepared for the Fight

The analysis suggests that several of the participants believed they were prepared for their time in the military. However, instances of bullying, addiction and violence

were seen as negative contributors to their military lives and potential motivators towards offending. The following section will explore the participants' experiences through the following subthemes: *Taking it on the chin*, *Man Up*, and *Not what I signed up for*.

4.5.1   Taking it on the Chin

This section explores how masculine stereotypes influenced the participants' military service. Consequently, the way in which the participants' viewed masculinity was essential to the creation of both the positive and negative stereotypes around violence that further informed the meaning they assigned to their military careers. The findings revealed that both the military and the participants viewed the participants' history of violence as beneficial to the service as the ability to engage in violence was perceived as the primary focus of military service:

> They [the recruiters] said 'the Para's will love you'…'you'll be fine because they are all thugs' …if you're tough then that was fine, you know, you almost got a pat on the back for that. (Matt)

Indeed, some of the participants seemed to find solace in the violence that was perpetuated during their military careers as it encouraged feelings of belonging for them:

> It's just in the army you're just fighting all the time, it's just boys…you's fighting then you're best of pals after. (Stephen)

This highlights the need for participants to feel a sense of belonging and social cohesion amongst a new group of individuals due to their previous lack of bonding experiences (Flack and Kite, 2021; Swann Jr *et al*., 2009; MacCoun, 1996).

As such, several participants reported their experiences with childhood violence as being beneficial to them, as they were encouraged to engage in 'social' fights alongside their formal training to gain 'respect'. As such, it appeared as though the presence of domestic violence in the participants' childhoods further influenced the participants' understanding of violence and masculinity in particular (Hui and Maddern, 2021), as highlighted by Lewis:

> That kind of masculine man…fight club …Boxing wasn't good enough though…You can't inflict as much pain as you want on that person… And this is what they [the Co's] are wanting to see. (Lewis)

For Max, he was encouraged to enter unofficial fighting competitions on base. To engage in violence successfully provided opportunities for pride and the development of a new social identity in which the participants were no longer vulnerable to the violence of others:

> 'Two men enters, one man leaves' is a real thing, this isn't made up… I went through 12 guys before they got me which I was quite proud of…I was like the greatest guy in the world… but I was finally proud. (Max)

> I've got like fight in me, it was one of my main rules even in the army, fight with all you've got… Fight first, ask questions later. (Keith)

These narrations align with research that suggests that the military can be seen to encourage a distorted understanding of the role of violence in the recruits' lives at key developmental stages when individuals are more likely to be vulnerable (Bouffard, 2003; Reuben *et al.*, 2016). Importantly, for several of the participants, the ability to engage in violence was seen as a core aspect of their identities learned and developed throughout their childhoods, that they could further develop in the military (Mrug, Madan and Windle; 2016). Violence elicited forms of pride that they had not experienced up until that point. Research highlights how being seen as 'successfully violent' could have allowed the participants to see themselves through the lens of having a new social identity. One in which they could be successful individually and amongst the group though engagement with the social norms that were being perpetuated amongst their fellow recruits (Pickett, Brewer and Silver, 2002; Brewer, 1991; MacCoun, 1996).

The development of a new social identity through violence was seen as a positive experience for several of the participants. However, others felt as though the military had betrayed them by encouraging acts of unsanctioned violence and overlooking acts of bullying and violence against the younger recruits. Importantly, several of the participants felt as though the military did not protect the participants and those who the participants deemed vulnerable:

> Especially in the infantry side … you're taught to be violent and aggressive, it becomes acceptable…guys end up in the hospital and it's all shoved under the rug. (Chris)

> You just get punched in the face with no notice. There was nothing you could do. (Sean)

Given the lack of psychological and physical safety experienced by several of the participants throughout their childhood and adolescent stages, it was notable when

participants directly linked feelings of betrayal with their military journey. As the military was meant to be an escape from violence, the negative experiences relating to unsanctioned violence was seen as a breach of trust by several of the participants.

The consistent fear of violence seemed to perpetuate already engrained feelings of vulnerability and weakness in the participants, reminding them that they were not safe at home or in the military. In instances where a risk to personal safety was reported to the MOD, feelings of betrayal and disappointment in the support received from the institution and/or its agents was noted as negatively influencing the participants view of their time in the military:

> The Officers wouldn't encourage it (fighting) but they would not step in. Getting in trouble, drinking and fighting in that unit, it was the norm. (Matt)

> The problem you have is you're out there on the ranges with these guys… There's guys I've seen saying 'I'm going to shoot you'…And the Corporal's kind of like, 'So'. (Sean)

While the military utilises physical activity and training as a means to facilitate bonding and combat readiness, the utilisation of violence as a means of social bonding created an internal confliction around appropriate use for and purpose of violence:

> We were taught quite quickly to use your anger… you're going to a combat zone where you might have to take someone's life, you can't sugar coat that in any way. (Jeffrey)

> They taught me how to be aggressive…I kind of liked it, I loved it in fact…their response for me saying something back to them is to hit me so I always was fighting back. (Stephen)

As such, the breach of trust experienced by many of the participants was experienced as a betrayal that mirrored similar losses experienced throughout their childhoods. For many of the participants, the military's inability to meet the participants expectations of being a 'provider' or 'protector' engrained a sense of internal contradiction that would propel several of the participants into reporting feelings of disappointment and frustration at the loss of their military dream and their military identities.

4.5.2 Man Up

For many of the participants, a constant expression of an extreme kind of masculinity was noted to be more impactful than the violence during their time in the military. Several participants noted the desire to be seen as competent, strong and able to defend themselves when they joined up. However, difficult home lives and limited life experiences impacted how resilient the participants were towards the constant attacks on their 'manhood':

> Because in the Army its all, 'I'm a man.'… it's all they say… They just said 'Grow up'…I had many issues as many boys who joined the Army as children do. (Max)

Experiencing a consistent narrative of being told to 'man up' was not a sentiment that fostered positive memories for most participants, as similar experiences were cited in early childhood and throughout their early adolescence. Where participants cited joining the military as a means to escape verbal and physical violence, this form of overtly 'hyper masculine' training contributed to a loss of their military identity, as the participants wanted to be in the military but felt acutely aware at the time that they did not have the resilience to withstand this form of training.

For several of the participants, the inability to align their views and experiences of masculinity with the constant narrative of being told they were 'not man enough' contributed feeling as though they had to engage in masculine behaviours and narratives in order to be successful:

> They said 'you're never going to progress in your career if you're just a wallflower or you're just there' but I think at times I was maybe too colourful…like a rainbow, and it got me in trouble. (Will)

> There's the very man up kind of mentality for anything. And particularly when you are boxing and stuff, you get that a lot like, 'Man up'. (Max)

As Max as illustrated, even being regarded as a good fighter and suitable for unsanctioned fights did not qualify him as being 'man enough'. For several of the participants, including Max, the constant reiteration of violence in both verbal and physical forms experienced in training increased their inability to emotionally regulate, which resulted in instances of defiance and rebellion (Mueller and Tronick, 2020; Erickson *et al.*, 2008). Further, several participants cited the constant negative reinforcements as contributing to instances where the use of violence was utilised as a form of retaliation against their peers and CO's, which was often in direct opposition of their own physical and psychological safety:

> He starts kicking me in the ribs because I'm doing my press-ups…it's like 'I'm not accepting this, no corporal, no corporal', I just…I liked talking back and it didn't always end well for me. (Will)

> In the army, there was a lot of physical assaults… … I don't know if it was getting punched every time, all that…I became paranoid…that's just the way it is in the Army. (Sean)

Here Max recalled an incident where his mother rang him during training. Following this call, Max experienced what appeared to be extreme forms of bullying by his CO's and his fellow recruits:

> I got called mummy's boy for the rest of the time I was in it. You can imagine it was quite a running joke… it could've changed how I was seen, so yeah it was (traumatic)…There's a fine lines between bullying and banter, ay?. (Max)

Additional narrations of bullying through the use of feminising insults were reported with high frequency by several of the participants:

> They just went, 'oh, you're acting like a wee girl getting on here'….and I'm not letting them speak to me like that. (Keith)

Consequently, the participants' diminished self –esteem further increased the internal narrative held by some that success in the military was unattainable. Where the participants acknowledged the harm that was being done to them through damaging and consistent overtly masculine periods of abuse, a lack of support was cited. Further, when Sean complained to his CO, his complaints were not acknowledged, further increased feelings of 'worthlessness' and incompatibility with military culture:

> I says 'I don't want to press no charges. I just want it on record that I've made a complaint of assault from them people' [his senior officers].They got off anyway…They didn't just wreck mine (life)…For me, it was just bad and they [MOD] knew it was normal. (Sean)

To have their experiences undermined and diminished under the institutional banner of 'necessary' or 'normal' behaviour meant that several of the participants were once again on the 'outside', just as they were in relation to their families throughout their childhoods. Consequently, the participants' inability to assimilate to the military culture was often experienced as a failure and relayed as a consequence of their own character flaws. These experiences were akin to their earlier lives when the periods of neglect in childhood were experienced as self-inflicted or deserved (Grimell, 2018; Downey and Crummy, 2022). Ultimately, the constant micro-traumas led to some of the participants losing their military identity and wanting to leave the service prematurely.

4.6   Not What I Signed Up For

The following section explores the participants' disillusionment with military life, explored through feelings of military service 'not what they signed up'. As the majority of the participants joined the Armed Forces while under the age of eighteen, common

narratives about a lack of transitional support was cited as contributing to the difficulties they experienced whilst in the early stages of their military careers.

Importantly, a lack of emotional development was cited as contributing to the participants' lacking the capacity to enlist when they did. Consequently, many of the participants cited not fully emotionally grasping the impact of joining the service. As such, many now have a negative association in their minds about their time in the military:

> 16 you're still a child, you're a baby, I mean you don't understand the ramifications of the job that you're going to do… at 16 years old, it's all fun and games… it's not real to you, so you know, boy playing with toys as a kid.(Jeffrey)

> I wish I joined when I was older because it's like you're not really wary of the surroundings they put you in…you're young and naive and you don't watch the news and read the papers. (Nick)

Due to limited life experiences and poor literacy, several of the participants cited being unaware for the extended contracts that military personnel must abide by when enlistment under the age of eighteen. This extended contract period was referred to by the participants as 'Service to the Queen'. These experiences led to many of the participants feeling as though the military had betrayed them by exploiting them in their youth as highlighted here:

> Because we're all idiots…. You see a 16-year-old walking up the street to sign up, you're in the army … sign 'allegiance to the Queen' and away you go…To be honest I wish I would've waited until I was older. (Max)

> Honestly you're still a kid when you're 18 but I first signed when I was 14 or 15. I was all right for maybe a month and then the month that I was Awol. (Nick)

It is apparent that participants had succumbed to the recruitment narratives outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis, with detrimental outcomes. Existing research identifies how through the recruitment of young, the military presents itself as willing to act as a symbiotic parent figure, responsible for the wellbeing and support of those under the age of eighteen (See: Hagopian and Barker, 2010; Spence, Henderson and Elder, 2013). However, the poor transitional support received by the participants, combined with a high occurrence of violence and feelings of poor military preparedness influenced feelings of helplessness in several of the participants:

> I never knew I was going to go to war like…to an actual war. I don't know but when it all kicked off with the war…I told my dad I was getting deployed…I'm like, "I cannot leave. (Keith)

For the participants who engaged in combat experiences from the age of eighteen, several expressed a how the combination of enlisting young and poor transitional support influenced their overall views of the military prior to transitioning out:

> I liked being in the military… just my views on the army just changed as soon as I got back [from combat]... I don't know it's just I was so young at that time. (Stephen)

Further, the lack of transitional support both into military life and upon return from combat, further instilled feelings of distrust in the military, which was exasperated by feelings of exploitation and neglect on behalf of the military:

> They exploited my ability to fight for their own gains 100%...I got nothing. (Max)

The feeling of being unprepared for the experiences that were ahead of them further contributed to difficulties adjusting to military culture and the internal expectations the participants had set for themselves. During this time, the participants reported poor psychological resilience, a lack of a stable support system, and a naivety about their ability to carry out orders as needed (Nindl *et al.*, 2018). The lack of preparedness that the participants revealed greatly impacted how the participants viewed their time in service, as they were acutely aware that asking for help did not align with military culture and the conveyed expectation to 'man up':

> I wish I joined at 18th… I was just a boy…Massive culture shock yeah, there's no mollycoddled, there's no mummy's there for you, it's quite a shock (Jeffrey)

Further to this, the participants cited a feeling of disillusionment about the freedoms they lost when joining, as military service was sold them as something more than 'just a job'. However, the reality of not being able to leave when the participants needed to or wanted further embedded a lack of autonomy and feelings of isolation that many of the participants had experienced in early childhood:

> I started like kind of like rebelling against them at that point and then slightly kind of going AWOL, I was quite alone. (Stephen)

> Trying to get out of this area and they keep me in this area … the only reason that I'm in here is that I wanted away from Scotland, I wanted to see the world and the world is not Edinburgh. (Rick)

Consequently, the inability to leave their local area meant they continued to be vulnerable to youth violence, poor socio-economic opportunities and an inability to truly 'escape' their pre-enlistment lives.

For several of the participants, the ability to escape poverty was cited as a primary motivator to join. However, several of the participants illustrated how poor financial management and periods of exploitation influenced their views of their time in the military:

> Your wellbeing was affected by it because you couldn't afford any kind of luxury or anything like that, if you smoked, that was it that was all your money gone. (Keith)

As such, many of the participants were left vulnerable to further periods of financial instability that they experienced in their early childhoods. Importantly, research has found that individuals who experience violence in the home are more vulnerable to the various types of exploitation described by the participants, including financial exploitation (Lloyd, 2018; Katz, 2016). When experiences of exploitation were explored, the participants cited the feeling that there was no way out of the circumstances they had found themselves in due a lack of financial literacy they had prior to joining:

> The double bubble[27] got me…If you've borrowed £100 you gave them £200 back on payday, then you spend your nine, 10 on a fight. They're not really supporting you because they're getting double their money back. It's a business. (Sean)

While this type of financial exploitation may not occur across all branches or bases, the participants viewed these experiences as sponsored by and exploitive of the military. Further enforcing many of the participants' negative views of the military.

For many of the participants who reported similar feelings of betrayal, a lack of support systems and limited educational qualifications or aspirations contributed to feelings of entrapment and helplessness. Consequently, several of the participants cited the inability to cope with conflicting narratives about wanting to leave and needing to stay, which research has found can negatively an individual's military life and their transition back into civilian life (Buckman *et al*., 2013; Helmus *et al*., 2018).

In opposition to the participants who left military service because of an abundance of violence, one participant wanted to leave due to a lack of violence:

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[27] The 'double bubble' was reported as a form of financial exploitation in which young recruits would borrow money from CO's without initially understanding the cost. Upon return of the lump sum borrowed, recruits would have to either fight to pay off their 'interest' or return double the amount borrowed

> I hated it…I don't know what I'd done had I not joined…All I was in for was shooting and all that, shooting people, that's all I wanted in for. (Nick)

While dissimilar from the remaining participants, Nick illustrated how influential unmet expectations were on the participants' ability to be successful in military life. Often, the participants who cited leaving before the end of their four year contracts reported wanting to leave the military earlier than planned due to family troubles, health reasons, or general stress. Research has found that the cited reasons for wanting to leave military service align with the experiences of early service leavers who come from poor socio-economic backgrounds and cite a history of adversity (Buckman *et al.*, 2013). However, the findings suggest that it was also a feeling of exploitation and unmet expectations on behalf of the military that contributed to the participants' trajectory towards offending.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the difficult and traumatic experiences that influenced the participants' entry into and exit out of military service. Each participant shared conflicting views on the importance of family, but instances of violence, abuse, and neglect were commonly cited throughout early childhood and adolescent stages, often aligning with the ACES framework. Although periods of support were discussed, the overall lack of security and a sense of family appeared in many cases to act as a catalyst towards military service for participants. The structural and psychological factors that shaped decisions to enter military service have been outlined, and what has become apparent through participants' accounts is their entry into service was often misinformed about the reality of military life. Whilst the violent nature of military service was at times fulfilling for participant, it was overwhelmingly the case that parallels with earlier traumas ultimately derailed the majority of the participants' military careers. The following chapter will explore the experiences described during their time transitioning out of the military upwards to incarceration.

Chapter Five: Findings Chapter Two

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings around exiting military service and the notable experiences the participants explored from their period as civilians, prior to current/any incarceration narratives. During the interviews, the participants relayed the context and their reasons for leaving the military through discharge, the MCTC or as a direct result of civilian charges. The chapter then explores the participants' accounts of their institutional experiences (i.e. the priory and military correction settings) which predate prison, and provides insight into their often problematic veteran experiences and behaviours. The chapter includes accounts of the participants' offending histories, and the experiences that were cited as turning points in the participants' lives. Two significant themes could be detected in these narratives: *The Path Regretted* and *Psychic Wounds Unhealed.*

Of the participant population, four were discharged directly from the military into civilian prisons, with the remaining having spent some time as civilians in the community prior to incarceration. The time from military discharge into the community to incarceration ranged from four days to ten years. The participants varied across discharge age ranges with the majority citing being under the age of thirty at the time of discharge. Over half of the participant population experienced active service and deployment, with two of the participants citing time in Northern Ireland and Germany as their primary deployments. Of the participant population, two served over ten years of service. The remaining thirteen left following their involvement with the MCTC, after a mandated period in the priory, through a medical discharge or as a result of misconduct.

5.2 The Path Regretted

A common narrative shared by the participants was one of disappointment with their time in military service. This contributed to difficulties during a period of realisation, where participants grappled with the notion that military life was not a suitable option for them. Many of the participants also cited feelings of regret at how military service had influenced the trajectories of their lives. The Path Regretted will explore these perceptions through the utilisation of the following sub-themes:

Conflicting consequences, Any way out, The bad kind of crime, and *Troubled transitions.*

5.2.1 Conflicting Consequences

In Findings Chapter One, the notion of the military being seen as a 'provider', unable to meet the participants' expectations and the impact of broken trust and feelings of betrayal were explored. It was noted that many joined with the intent to 'build a new family', with the military adopting a 'pseudo parent' role, responsible for similar areas of care to that of a corporate parent, through the provision of housing, medical care, education and nutrition (Spence, Henderson and Elder, 2013; The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014).

However, problems with the military acting as a pseudo parent arose when the participants placed a high level of institutional trust in the military, which was then perceived to have been broken through instances of violence and bullying by their perceived military role models (Neal, Shockley and Schilke, 2016). In this context, the lines between the pseudo parent and employer were confused. In some instances, the participants experienced their CO's as encouraging acts of violence and excessive alcohol. Further, as highlighted here, several of the participants cited instances where they knew the military could be relied upon to 'look the other way' during periods of rule breaking and offending:

> We'd tell the army we're going home for the weekend but they never checked... so we were going to see strippers at the age of like 16 and spend like a thousand quid. (Lewis)

> They [the military] knew as soon as I was going out and I was in a group of boys then an argument happened nine times out of ten I'd be down at the police station…nothing came of it. (Jim)

In other incidents, the participants experienced consequences for 'unbecoming' behaviours or were given formal warnings on their employment records. The lack of consistency contributed to several of the participants citing a lack of psychological safety and wellbeing. The lack of guidance during periods of offending arguably mirrors aspects of some participants' childhoods, where feelings of neglect were cited as contributing to periods of 'trouble'. Research has found that the lack of boundaries experienced throughout the early developmental stages of the participants' lives could have contributed to each of the participants citing variant attachment styles that contributed to their either 'over trusting' the military or mistrusting the military's ability

to support them (Purnell, 2010). As illustrated by Nick, he credited the military with trying to steer him away from crime and criminal justice sanctions:

> They (military) were trying to put us in the right direction but I dealt with the 110 days…the judge kicked the sentence after they stood up for me. (Nick)

Similarly, Will and Richard both explore how experiencing periods of support during their time in the priory influenced their ongoing view of military service:

> I say "I don't need to be here anymore, I want to get out of this place, can I come?" They're like "No. Not happening. You stay there another day." So they were looking after me in that aspect. (Will)

> Basically I'm missing home, missing family, because I was not talking to my parents at that point in time. They were very helpful. The Army talk you through and that wee bit advice. (Richard)

For both Sean and Will, the use of prescription medication in combination with excessive alcohol use led to several instances of offending. As a means to support each of them, engagement with the priory was enforced, rather than involvement with the MCTC or discharge:

> I got sectioned because I was going to kill them all. I thought they'd all been sleeping with my girlfriend…I got sectioned…I had drug-induced psychosis…but they did not kick me out (Sean)

> Revealed how much I was drinking and they [the military doctors] were giving me pills and he said [his CO] we'll send you in the priory instead (Will)

However, the type of support that was provided to several of the participants appears to not always have been in the best interest of the military, the participants or the victims of their offences. Instead, the support they received 'covered up' the unresolved issues the participants were contending with as illustrated by Richard:

> All these charges, domestic assault, two assault injuries and the drunk driving and that incident. Every time they just went, 'Oh you've got court case, you need a hired car, Officer Whatever is coming with you.'…they never pull me up, nothing, never nothing… Getting away with it all. (Richard)

For many of the participants, a lack of formal engagement with the criminal justice system throughout their lives meant that many of the behaviours (i.e. fighting, drug taking, theft, arson, criminal damage) cited in their pre-enlistment lives went unchallenged. As such, several of the participants lacked positive experiences with those deemed 'in authority' (i.e. police, probation, social workers), which contributed to the multifaceted way in which the participants viewed the military-as a provider or as an 'employer'. The extracts below illustrated the unpredictable way in which the military

reportedly handled instances of dangerous and illegal behaviours, further complicating the way in which the participants viewed behaviours associated with drinking and violence:

> I had a car crash [date omitted] from drink driving. And I got arrested for being AWOL. And the army came and collected me and they took me back to barracks and I got off of that. (Sean)

> I was colourful…I got my first trial got done for drunk driving…I got done by the bosses a few times for going out drinking before… It wasn't long after my drunk driving conviction that I was made barman though. (Will)

As highlighted in the literature, a willingness to engage in sensation seeking or dangerous behaviours is heighted in adolescent populations, as is the wiliness to engage in excessive alcohol use and drug taking (Dayan *et al.*, 2010). As almost all of the participant population joined the military at a young age, it appears as though they were increasingly vulnerable to the social norms that have been historically encouraged in the military around the use of alcohol (Meadows *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, of the fifteen participants, fourteen cited difficulties related to excessive alcohol use, with few reporting consequences for misuse:

> Put on report three times …I think it was turning up late, returning under the influence and just not returning…so I got charged for that. (Richard)

> You go on nights out…drink is just normalised. When I first went into my battalion at 17, it was just drink, drink, drink... I was used to fighting when I was young but like I never fought like that until the drink. (Stephen)

> It was like a big family in Germany, completely different thing for me … so if you get into trouble, you get crated [forced to drink] socially. (Eric)

Importantly, it seems there was a degree of adaptation and flexibility in treatment of behaviours that surrounded alcohol and violence in particular. As such, many viewed alcohol as a gateway towards feelings of belonging and as a means to avoid any psychological challenges the participants were experiencing as highlighted here:

> There's a big drinking culture and I was still young.... I wouldn't say I wasn't drinking because I had a problem, I was drinking because I could. (Matt)

> I think I've used drink because I'm trying to fit in…if I went out drinking, I always have to drink more, I use it to deal with the problems that are going in my head and just take the bottle. (Jeffrey)

Interestingly, almost all of the participants cited a lack of excessive alcohol use or a prior history of drug use prior to joining the military. Sean discusses how military

culture encouraged his use of illicit drugs, previously cited as absent from his pre-enlistment life:

> I learnt a lot of things in the military. I learnt that I enjoyed hash…I was bang into that lifestyle, the drugs…I don't know if it's easy access as well because I was getting them for free. (Sean)

The distinct availability of alcohol and drugs cited by the participants seemingly disregards what is known about the relationship between combat experience and the prevalence of alcohol misuse and addiction (See: Meadows *et al.*, 2022; Brown *et al.*, 2013). Subsequently, when some of the participants were unable to cope with poor mental health as a result of their combat experience, alcohol was sought out as a means to cope:

> I was just young and it was like obviously drink was involved…My world collapsed at 18… the assault happened and like harming him [causing brain damage]…started drinking quite a lot like at weekends, and then I ended up drunk driving and then ended up got charged for that. (Stephen)

For Stephen, his untreated mental health problems and his misuse of alcohol triggered a cycle of violence and offending that led to involvement with the MCTC and early discharge from military service. Further to this, where alcohol was cited as a key contributor to instances of offending, the participants appeared to lack an understanding around the excessive use of alcohol and their unresolved issues in their home lives and in their military lives. As such, several of the participants appeared to lack reflective insights around the influence alcohol had on their offending histories:

> Every offence I've had, I've been drinking… I was home on leave and got a drink, couldn't explain how it happened, it starts with drink (Jeffrey)

> I was taking my mates and drinking…that was getting me in a lot of different trouble and I'm going through a lot of pain and aggression and stuff and getting done for hurting people for the first time in my life. (Lewis)

Importantly, several participants expressed a view that it was the military that propelled their violent trajectory rather than their pre-enlistment environment, personal characteristics, or social groups. For Jim, it was the constant combination of alcohol and violence that he attributed to his offending history since joining at the age of sixteen:

> I wouldn't say I got in trouble until I came out the Army, to be honest. (Jim)

During these periods of offending, the subject of discharge was not discussed with the participants, which further highlights the conflicting messages that were being conveyed to the participants during vulnerable periods in their lives. Further, the lack of formal

sanctions could have been a mitigating factor in the continuation of the participants' offending histories, as they lacked any consequence to their actions at that time as highlighted by Eric and Will:

> I mean if I was kicked out, I could've seen that as a wakeup call… but I was still 18, 19. (Will)

> In the long run it probably fucked me…probably if they gave me like a shitty six months sentence from the start then like… (Eric)

Here, Eric acknowledges how formal consequences could have provided him with a rationale to stop his ongoing offending or access the support he required at the time.. The findings align with similar research that suggests that a lack of institutional adjustment combined with pre-enlistment experiences of adversity can lead to conflicting feelings of being let down when punished for bad behaviour, and for not being held to account (Walters, 1987; Medact, 2016).

For the majority of participants who received support from the priory, these experiences were cited as a temporary detour prior to discharge. For Nick, being sent to the priory was cited as the primary contributor to his downward trajectory out of the military. Nick illustrates how the type of support and the readiness of the individual to access that support is imperative in their military experience:

> I went to priory and then I went to [name of MCTC]… after that it was just jail then, it was a bit shit…I had the good life before. (Nick)

Ultimately, the military was cited as sending conflicting messages about what behaviours were acceptable and what behaviours would warrant involvement with military mental health services or the MCTC. The absence of structure, accountability and trust in the participants' earlier life stages meant that the participants were more vulnerable to feelings of neglect and betrayal when the military was not able to meet the needs and expectations the participants set (Seery, 2011; Sheikh *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, involvement with both the MCTC and the priory were viewed through a lens of betrayal. While this may have been seen as a supportive move by the military, the participants appeared to have experienced this particular form of sanction has contributory to their leaving the military and subsequently experiencing various forms of difficulties in civilian life.

5.2.2 Any Way Out

The experience of isolation, 'toxic' masculinity, bullying and violence relayed in Findings Chapter One contributed to many of the participants actively seeking out an early discharge from the military through the use of drugs, alcohol misuse use and acts of non- sanctioned violence that could not be ignored. Stephen provides insights into the lengths he and other participants went to in order to leave military service prior to their contract expiration:

> I knew the drug test was coming so I went to in, been on coke and everything on the weekend… I even had like people saying to me … 'Oh hey, watch your pee' 'Let me get in that for you', I'm like 'No'. (Stephen)

In several instances, the participants cited engagement with drug and alcohol misuse in their pre-enlistment lives and while in the early stages of their military careers as a means to belong. However, here Stephen highlights how belonging was not motivation enough to desist from drug use as he simply wanted out of military service:

> I wanted to get out but I couldn't get out because the only thing I could do was medical discharge or chucked out through drugs, so I've taken drugs to get myself chucked out. (Stephen)

The findings here align with research that suggests the loss of being seen as a 'good soldier' in their own world views contributed to a willingness to engage in misconduct behaviours that would ultimately contribute to their discharge (Wikström, 2011).

Further, the inability to maintain what was perceived to be an 'acceptable' military identity led to several of the participants 'acting out', going 'Awol', or engaging in acts of violence as a means to retaliate against the military. Lewis explored the impact of feeling as though he was being treated as he was not 'doing the right thing'. As such, when military life was not aligning with the expectations he had set for himself, he returned to behaviours from his pre-enlistment life:

> Like I wanted to do the right thing…I made sure I was always there on time and stuff but at night, going back [to home town] and drinking, and on weekends trying to get with girls, fighting. (Lewis)

Research that explores the link between adverse childhood experiences, childhood trauma, impulsivity and deviant behaviours speaks to many of the experiences the participants cited as contributory to their leaving the military. As such, many of the participants cited experiences of fitting in well and having positive training experiences, followed by impulsive decisions to engage in fighting or excessive drinking on weekends away. Highlighting an internal conflict around their capacity to fulfil their

military contracts and the pull of their pre-enlistment lives (see: Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Pratt and Cullen, 2000; Arneklev *et al.*, 1993; Burt, Simons and Simons, 2006; Burton *et al.*, 1998).

Subsequently, impulsivity and a lack of guidance from the military was often cited as a primary contributor to leaving as illustrated by Keith:

> I shouldn't have got out, maybe a smack could have kept me in. (Keith)

As highlighted in the literature, during key periods of development, adolescents especially may choose risky behaviours when challenges to their self-esteem or self-identity are made (Dayan *et al.*, 2010). Subsequently, when many of the participants felt as though their military identity was at risk, they were more likely to engage in acts that would serve as a form of self-fulling prophecy.

For several of the participants, there was an apparent lack of reflection as to whether a single factor or combination of events led to their wanting to leave military life, as illustrated by Nick:

> I never express how I feel about the situation…it's a mad thing to say because it's like I went through a good straight life, the pure kind, and I loved it. And I that's the mad thing, I used to enjoy it and then I didn't. (Nick)

As such, it appeared as though it was a combined trifecta of going through identity shifts, transitioning from adolescence into emerging adulthood and not having the support to deal with unresolved childhood traumas that contributed to many of the participants' impulsive decision to leave or to engage in behaviours that would result in their discharge.

For the majority of the participants, joining before the age of eighteen meant they were particularly vulnerable to lacking in the experiences and support that are required to be successful in the transition out of 'emerging adulthood' and into adulthood, leaving them especially vulnerable to period of poor mental health (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Sokol, 2009; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead; 2008). Sean illustrates how poor mental health, potentially as a consequence of his deployment experiences, left unsupported influenced periods of addiction and engagement with violence in the community:

> I started to first notice it (not being mentally ok) in Ireland after Iraq…. starting you know going AWOL and joining in fights…I went to see a city doctor and I says, Look I am depressed and stressed, I cannot go back to the Army…he just gave me some pills. (Sean)

For Sean, the act of seeking out help did not result in his discharge as intended, rather, he cited developing an addiction to the medication the civilian doctor prescribed. This addiction ultimately led to Sean being sectioned in the priory prior to his being discharged from the military. Where some participants appeared apprehensive to explore their reasons for wanting to return to civilian life, others were open to exploring their lived experiences but lacked the reflexivity necessary to correlate their pre-enlistment lives with the challenges they experienced during military service and their subsequent incarceration.

5.2.3 The Wrong Kind of Crime

While the military has been cited to be somewhat complacent where instances of violence and alcohol related charges were cited, those who engaged in offences related to domestic violence and sexual offending cited different experiences. For each of the participants who cited serious and sexual offences, the military was cited as withdrawing support and enforcing immediate discharge. The varying institutional responses cited have further illustrated how a lack of congruent consequences for those who offend while in military service could contribute to more serious instances of offending later on in life, as highlighted in following section.

Although many of the participants reported instances of pre-enlistment anti-social behaviour and violence, none of the participants reported being perpetrators of pre-enlistment instances of domestic or sexual violence prior to joining the military[28]. For Eric, the combination of excessive alcohol use and difficulties adjusting to military life were cited as contributory to the seriousness of his offenses. While Eric cited an awareness of the dangers of excessive alcohol use for himself, he continued to drink consistently while enlisted in the military:

> I get violent on drink … I became angry really fast and it happened….I knew what I've done [Rape, kidnapping, and murder] is stupid. (Eric)

Importantly, when Eric cited previous instances of offending that related to alcohol use, he also cited the provision of social and formal support with his alcohol intake.

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[28]It is possible that previous instances of domestic and sexual violence were present in the participants' offending histories, which they chose not to disclose when prompted. The lack of data in this regard does not dismiss the possibility of these types of offences occurring. However, the nature of qualitative research can often require a level of sensitivity that must be respected in order to ensure that the safety of the participants is prioritised as the advertised purpose of the interview was around their military history and not their offending histories.

However, when Eric was involved with more serious offences, he recounted his experience of military support:

> I didn't know what to do. I didn't know [the discharge] was real… They [his CO] went to the prison, I had a quick medical, signed a couple of forms saying that it's you and discharge was complete. And it was the last I heard from them [the military]. (Eric)

The immediate withdrawal of support was also cited by Chris and Will. Each of these experiences were cited with a tone of surprise at how the military responded to their offences and the lack of support that was offered to them at the time:

> Police investigation was going nowhere at that point so they [his CO] just went, "You know what, you know, you're not coming back. (Chris).

> Eventually, after my leave, I got my court case acquitted but I was out… but I was still drinking badly and getting myself into all sorts of bother. (Will)

While alcohol related offences often correlated with the provision of support through mental health support or the provision of support in court by the military, more serious instances of offending often correlated with a withdrawal of formal support, including military to civilian transitional support as illustrated by Jeffrey:

> I did not get any transitional support…I never really went from military to civilian life, I went from prison to civilian life and I went from military straight to prison life. (Jeffrey)

Historically, the military has been noted as being an organisation known for 'protecting its own', which could have contributed to the participants feeling as though the military would protect them whatever instances of offending they engaged in, as they had done so in the past (Multinational Capability Development Campaign, 2014; Beuhler *et al..*, 2019). As many of the participants were engaged in military service from a young age, the presence of conflicting narratives around violence and alcohol use lead to conflicting behaviours which appeared to remain misunderstood by several of the participants (Erikson, 1950; Copp *et al..*, 2019). Research explores the notion of the 'dark side' of institutional trust which could help to understand how the participants appeared to trust the military to protect them irrespective of their offending histories (Neal, Shockley and Schilke, 2016). As such, several of the participants' appeared to place a significant amount of trust in the military with regard to providing them with a continued level of support once the types of offences they committed escalated.

Where the participants experienced the withdrawal of support as a consequence of offending, further feelings of betrayal and broken trust were explored. Further, these

experiences could have deepened the impact of losing their military identities and contributed to many of the difficulties cited when discussing the transition back into civilian life.

5.2.4 Troubled Transitions

For the majority of the participants, a lack of transitional support was cited as contributory to difficulties experienced in civilian life. While the participants would have benefitted from transitional support upon entering into military life, it was upon leaving the military where several of the participants cited difficulties adjusting, to their environments and their newly attained 'failed' identities. During the period of civilian transition, of the fifteen participants, four received no formal support due to their direct journey to prison. Two were offered formal transitional support, and one accepted that offer. For the remaining participants who cited a lack of transitional support from the military, a barrier to them engaging in help seeking correlated with feelings of shame, helplessness and isolation after leaving the military prematurely. Internal narratives of shame were cited by ten of the participants when asked about their experiences of transitioning out of military service. The feelings of isolation were most often noted amongst participants involved with sexual offences. These findings may highlight the importance of belonging for individuals at risk of engaging in serious and sexual offences.

For several of the participants, shame was explored in several contexts: as a result of poor support, as an internal driver away from help seeking and as a driver towards offending. For Keith, the shame he experienced from his then wife isolated him from support with his alcohol misuse in particular:

> I was not well and on my own… I did not ask for help though… I feel ashamed of myself for leaving (Keith)

As illustrated by Keith, the impact of returning home to a dysfunctional support system contributed to a lack of help seeking and feelings of social isolation, which could have contributed to his sexual offending history:

> Catholic people basically blame the British army... really, the way they have been brought up is if you are an Army man, you're scum…So I just keep myself to myself. (Keith)

Further, experiences of isolation contributed to a perceived loss of comradery and sense of belonging that was experienced during their time in the military. As illustrated by

Richard, Lewis and Will, the experience of transitioning from military to civilian life unsupported led to social, physical and psychological isolation. Further, the extreme sense of isolation led to behaviours which the participants acknowledge were unhealthy for them at the time:

> So hard when I lived down here. I had no idea what I was doing and nobody to speak to. (Richard)

> I went from doing something every day. Someone told me for every day what to do or whatever, then to just physically by myself. (Lewis)

> My first week when I got a bed sit down South, literally bed, cupboard and a wall, it was… I was so lonely…I'd just lay there in the dark and smoke this is crap…I hated it (Will)

Importantly, the notion of both greedy and total institutions in relation to military service have been explored as a means to understand how the military relies on families to engage in the provision of support for armed forces service personnel and veterans (Segal, 1986; Goffman, 1957). However, for the participants in this study, each institution (i.e. the military and the family) appeared to rely on the other to provide transitional support to the participants and many consequently, returned home to dysfunctional home lives:

> The day I got out…I go up to my mum's house. And my mum had a joint rolled for me and that was that. (Nick)

> I was living an easy life in camp, I then got married, it was turmoil, I then went back to camp again…no one spoke to me about how am I getting on, do you want help with this, there was nothing like that. (Matt)

This ultimately resulted in a lack of support, leaving the participants feeling as though they were unable to seek help, as highlighted by Keith and Sean:

> I kind of didn't want to intrude on my family…I never really went back to visit…I just felt like I was intruding. (Sean)

> I thought it was never the right time to talk to my family, I just wanted to keep it to myself and I didn't want to say anything. (Keith)

The experience of being discharged with little support and preparation further impacted where the participants situated themselves within their view of military culture and within their views of the self, as they went from a service member with 'brothers in arms' to isolation and lonely civilians with limited periods of time to adjust (Flack and Kite, 2021; Grimell and van den Berg, 2020). As a means to engage in acts of belonging that would mirror military life, several of the participants sought out relationships with

former service personnel. However, as illustrated by Lewis and Richard, many of those relationships led to dangerous behaviours and subsequent offending:

> Me and him [a friend] were in together, Afghanistan together… came back from work and me and him ended up going for a drink in a pub… then we've ended up fighting. (Lewis)

> I think it's mostly because I don't feel connected with anybody in there, all my connections were with the military folk … and I just fell back on old ways… I'll be going through like 15, 12 beers a night instead of drinking alone. (Richard)

> She (partner) wanted to be with us. But I wanted to be with cocaine. (Lewis)[29]

For some of the participants, isolation was cited as a means to avoid the process of transitioning back into civilian life altogether:

> It's like I wasn't a shutout…I just I didn't want to deal with it (Jeffrey)

The loss of military identity combined with a sense of not belonging contributed to many of the participants becoming engulfed in a cycle of drinking and social isolation that increased several of the participants propensity to engage in sexual offending as illustrated by Will:

> My social life just disintegrated…I ended up getting in trouble online...That's how it happened… Kind of detached myself from the social aspects of life and compensated with a phone. (Will)

Historically, the MoD has come under scrutiny for its inadequate provision of transitional support (Godier *et al.*, 2017; Fulton *et al.*, 2019). However, for several of the participants, it was not the process of leaving that left them feeling disillusioned with their military service, but the way in which they were discharged which compounded feelings of vulnerability and aloneness as illustrated below:

> I knew I was getting out…But then it's just get your stuff out and pretty much you're out…you're supposed to get a pack or something if you leave saying 'Oh here's some numbers, here's some information' but I don't know, I got nothing. (Stephen)

Although Stephen actively sought out his discharge, the reality of becoming a civilian within a short period of time appeared to influence the negative associations he made to military life and his time in the service. A similar sentiment was shared by Jim and Lewis as illustrated below:

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[29] In order to retain the authentic voice shared by the participants, colloquialisms and jargon have remained as part of the quotes throughout the thesis. In this instance, Lewis is referring to how his girlfriend wanted to be with him, but he wanted to engage in drug taking.

> You know, once you get out that front gate and give your ID back, you're nothing to do with us. So you're kind of standing there and I was like fuck. (Jim)

The process of being discharged within a short period of time contributed to a further feeling of betrayal by several of the participants. While the participants themselves cited a lack of preparedness for the realities of civilian life (i.e. relationships, financial management, housing, and employment), there was still a sense of discontentment in their narrations when discussing the day of discharge itself as highlighted here:

> My last day was basically, "There's your stuff, there a train there, goodbye." there was no build up to it…there was nothing. (Max)

Consequently, many of the participants cited leaving the military as a consequence of impulsivity, rather than determination to leave:

> So it's like from the camp where I was, I was taken away from everyone who I was with, all of my stuff was taken down… got my travel home and then that was it. (Lewis)

Notably, this lack of foresight could be attributed to the recruits' age or to their likelihood to engage in impulsive action due to periods of adversity experienced in childhood (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Pratt and Cullen, 2000). Further to this, the impulsive decision to leave the military or engage in behaviours that led to discharge often lead to wider financial consequences and family break downs:

> I got out of the army penniless… Pretty much said 'you failed, you're out' …But I've just took my mortgage…I'm screwed, my misses is going to kill me, but…yea it was pretty quick… There was no resettlement. (Sean)

For Sean the swift transition back into civilian life, without employment and without the financial means to support his family contributed to a lack of adjustment period in civilian life and a lack of financial, psychological and relational safety:

> I was on a lot of drugs. I was supplying drugs. The birds [partner] going mental… I had a lot of pressure like that in the military and then I come back…I just feel like I was being stretched into a million different places. (Sean)

Further, the lack of financial preparation was noted as influential to how the participants viewed their time in the military as they went from living on base to homelessness in a matter of days. As illustrated by Jim, a lack of prior experiences with housing, utilities and general financial responsibilities hindered their understanding of what would be required of them financially in civilian life:

> When you go to the career's office, they give you a brown book, they say a soldier earns this, council tax is, £3.15 a week, and down the street it's £45, you know what I mean but that's not the reality of it. (Jim)

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While the military provides several types of transitional support for individuals who leave the military 'honourably', there are considerably less resources available to support those with less than ideal service records. As 'early service leavers', many of the participants were still in the early developmental stages of adulthood with limited life experiences. Subsequently, they appeared to have little resilience to cope with the immediate challenges that would come with an early discharge. The findings align with the research that suggest that where individuals experience blunt transitions without adequate support, a lack of psychological resilience to the change can cause heighted levels of stress and poor abilities to cope with the changes (Salvatore and Taniguchi, 2021; Tavernier and Willoughby, 2012).

Due to the limited experiences reported in the participants pre-enlistment lives, much of their adult identities were informed by military service. Consequently, many of the participants cited the loss of their military identity as affecting their view of employment opportunities and the skills they gained while in military service. As illustrated by Matt, the transition out of the military was muddled by a lack of employment transition support as well as a lack of emotional and practical transitional support:

> You know in the army, you're like toy soldiers, you train for things that aren't going to happen …You're 18, you'd never had a proper job…I went from being not stressed about money to stressed, to not a care in the world then nothing in a month. (Matt)

Equally, several of the participants felt inadequately prepared for civilian employment as illustrated by Max:

> I woke up most days and I still thought I was in the army. … The only skills I had coming out of the army were basically how to fight…I wasn't prepared to go and work in a factory and stand in a factory for 12 hours processing a chicken. (Max)

Due to significant periods in the military, several of the participants cited being too institutionalised to engage in civilian employment. As several of the participants cited less than five years of service, many were ineligible for the level of support they required. Consequently, many of the participants cited feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness that resulted in homelessness and excessive alcohol use:

> I was out for two and a half years… I didn't have any real skills, I only have like GCSEs plus criminal record and then for the last 6 months I couldn't handle it, I started drinking again.(Jeffrey)

> I was in the homeless hostels for almost about a year …you couldn't really work when you're in the hostel… they take basically all your money off you… I imagine you've heard this story a million times, I ended up living on the streets. (Max)

The findings align with the research that suggest that veteran identity, transitional preparedness and difficulties (i.e. homelessness, isolation, and underemployment) are intrinsically linked (See: Bahtic *et al..*, 2020; Gordon, Burnell and Wilson, 2020*;* Brewer and Herron, 2022). In particular, a lack of communication about the support available in civilian life was cited as contributory to a poor transition for some:

> There was no support, it was like 'Here, thank you very much, Go'. (Richard)

For the participants, negative experiences transitioning into civilian life compounded the loss felt by leaving the military prematurely. Equally, these experiences also contributed to similar dysfunctional behaviours that occurred in pre-enlistment and military life (i.e. theft, excessive alcohol use, and violence). As such, several of the participants illustrated how a lack of employment and housing contributed to prolonged periods of offending:

> Smoking weed and drinking all day, that was pretty much my existence back then…then spent three or four months living in a stolen car. (Max)

The further idolisation of violence cited by the participants appeared to be compounded by the loss of military identity, homelessness and feelings of inadequacy once in civilian life. Importantly, several of the participants cited an increased level of violence upon their release from military service due to poor emotional regulation and alcohol misuse:

> Got drunk on my medicine and ended up fighting and charged with serious assault… then I went to jail…I also battered a man…jail for that and for stealing my mum's car, went to jail for that…I've been in ten times since getting kicked out [of the military]. (Jim)

> The last time I was out [of prison], I was out for eleven hours. It's not really for violence…a few of them have been police assaults …the worse thing I was arrested for was attempted murder…I developed an unhealthy obsessions for fighting and causing fighting with my girlfriend. (Lewis)

It appears that it was not just the participants who were stuck in a repetitive cycle. Just as the participants repeatedly offending, the institutions (i.e. the criminal justice system, families, and the military), in place to provide support or accountability repeatedly did not do so when the participants were vividly showcasing their inability to cope in civilian life.

The repeated lack of interjection from institutions, which have the power to support individuals who offend or punish them through incarceration, appears to convey a similar message to participants as that of the military: that dangerous and illegal behaviours may not have formal consequences. Therefore, the participants appear to not only lack the motivation to desist but also the justification to do so as there have rarely been formal consequences to their actions. Illustrated below Stephen and Nick highlight how a lack of formal consequences to their offending histories has led to several instances of recidivism:

> I've got quite a lot of charges since then... I got done with an assault with injuring with a blunt weapon... just steaming drunk and I ended up grabbing a machete...The other times I never got to jail. (Stephen)

> Probably avoided jail a couple of times. I got done for attempted murder, I slashed him a couple of times. I was also supplying drugs, got back to back...before that I was in for drugs. (Nick)

As several of the participants were more likely to learn views around alcohol use, mental health, and appropriate uses of violence (i.e. in combat only or potentially as a means to protect oneself) from the military due to their age at enlistment, they appeared more vulnerable to distorted cognitions around offending. Further, due to the disconnect between actions and consequences the participants experienced from both the military and the criminal justice system, it appears that the participants were more likely to take the violent skills learned in the military into their civilian lives. Consequently, creating a cluster of victims that all three institutions could have potentially prevented.

The findings explored in this chapter re-iterate the importance of veterans being supported in the military to civilian transition from the first initial conversation around discharge. Equally, when exploring the processes around the military to civilian life transition, considerations around duty of care, age of service member, and pre-enlistment experiences should be taken into account in order to adequately prepare service members for the process of returning to their civilian lives (Fossey *et al.,* 2017). As service members' families are often left out of the transition discussion, the full extent of how families can support veterans in the civilian transition is purely speculatory (Fulton *et al.*, 2019). However, the findings revealed that had families approached the participants early on in their transition into civilian life, the difficulties reported may have been lessened.

5.3 Psychic Wounds Unhealed

The analysis uncovered a wide range of adverse childhood experiences and experiences of trauma that went unacknowledged and untreated throughout the participants' lives. The participants were not asked specifically about trauma, having a PTSD diagnosis, or about any particular mental health disorders. For the purpose of trust building, cultural adaptation in relation to language was utilised between myself and the men depending the feelings in the room at the point of interview (Naṕoles-Springer and Stewart, 2006). Terms used to discuss periods of trauma included: *troubles, sad times, things regarded as difficult, challenging* and *shocking*. Nevertheless, if the participant brought forward their experiences of a specific diagnosis, including PTSD, the subject was explored in a deeper context. The following section explored the experiences that often unknowingly shaped the lives of the participants through the following subthemes: *Compounded Traumas or Challenges* and *Something is not right.*

5.3.1 Compounded Traumas or Challenges

The following section explores the relationships that exist between challenging lived experiences, traumatic experiences and poor mental health as they relate to the participants life histories. Important to note that the purpose of the exploration around PTSD and C-PTSD is not to explore the prevalence of PTSD in the participant population but to explore how presentations of trauma related disorders, that went unexplored and unresolved, contributed to the participants difficulties throughout their lives. While the majority of the participants cited adverse childhood experiences in their pre-enlistment lives, all fifteen participants cited negative experiences that could align with the formal definition of trauma explored previously explored in Chapter Two.[30]

For several of the participants, the way in which their acts of help seeking were responded to triggered feelings of vulnerability akin to early childhood experiences of neglect and dismissal, which could have compounded and worsened their traumas. In total fourteen participants reported receiving an inadequate level of support from individuals they viewed as 'protectors' throughout their life course. As such, several of

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[30] A reminder that amongst psychological research, the term 'trauma' refers to an experience that is emotionally distressing, difficult to process, or shocking to the point that an individual experiences long term negative consequences (McGinley and Varchevker, 2013).

the participants cited negative experiences that further embedded already present feelings of unworthiness or inadequacy. Illustrated by Chris and Matt, the overtly masculine responses to their help seeking further embedded feelings of shame and inadequacy, which contributed to an apprehension to engage in further help seeking in the future:

> I sought out mental health team because they're the only ones that were allowed to put me back on my antidepressants, and the response I got from the mental health team was, "Man up, it happens.". (Chris)

> Even medical, I was told if you're injured, then you can, you get paid, you know, but there was no mental health support there whatsoever, nothing. (Matt)

The breach of trust experienced by several of the participants with regard to dismissed acts of help seeking, reports of violence and reports of bullying contributed to an apprehension to seek help in their later lives. Research has found that psychological interventions from individuals in positions of trust (i.e. social workers, teachers, military CO's) are influential to the psychological development of individuals who report difficulties in their childhood and early adolescent stages (Dierkhising *et al.*, 2013; Adelman and Taylor, 2021b). Where the military was not responsible for this breach of care, the participants' carers, educators and parents were cited as neglecting their responsibility to protect the participants through the provision of mental health support.

Lewis highlights how the lack of support received following his mother's reported abandonment left him with unresolved feelings of anger and resentment:

> I was angry and see I was picked on at school… I've not had time to deal with any of what happened when I was a kid. Because I was constantly dotting about...I'm about fucked in the head …. I'm an angry person…more resentment towards my parents. (Lewis)

Traumas related back to negative maternal relationships where cited with a higher prevalence amongst the participants with a history of sexual offending. These experiences were not limited to the participants' pre-enlistment lives, but continued throughout several of their early adulthoods as illustrated by Richard:

> My mum stood up in the dock against us and tried to get me another sentence... She was starting doing it [selling drugs] while I was away…I came back, the money was gone. The drugs were gone and they had left me. (Richard)

The impact of losing positive maternal role models has been reported in the research to correlate with instances of low self-esteem, a higher prevalence of sexual offending, and a higher rate of suicide (Curcio, Mak and George, 2018; Abbiati *et al.*, 2014). For

several of the participants, the difficult relationships with their mothers appeared to be equally contributory to their enlistment and their reasons for leaving. Here Jim explores how being put in a carer position by his mother when he was newly enlisted contributed to the development of poor mental health:

> I got a phone call from my mum, 'You need to go to your brother's, She's like 'He's took all his tablets, depression tablets, painkillers, everything.'…I got to my brother's and he was lying shaking underneath a table…I didn't talk to no one, no one asked. (Jim)

Having recently joined the military, Jim was left to resolve the trauma of finding his brother close to death without any formal support from the military or from his family. However, Jim reported this incident with a sense of unimportance as many of the participants did. Throughout the interviews, it appeared as though many of the participants viewed traumatic experiences in a similar vein to violence in the home, as 'normal'.

As such, several of the participants cited lived experiences that altered their life trajectories with a sense of detachment. Importantly, when the participants cited help seeking in relation to these experiences, many of them reported a lack of support provided to them as influential to their life trajectories:

> When me and my missus lost our child, I ended up getting bad on diazepam and the Valium's and that. I ended up getting bad on it and taking ketamine…I was told I was wasting police time. (Lewis)

> My mum had a nervous breakdown…I was six but I chose to stay with her. (Sean)

A general lack of acknowledgment around the challenges that arose as a result of these experiences was notable in the participants' narrations. Research that explores adversity in childhood notes that negative experiences in childhood can contribute to a form of emotional detachment to traumatic experiences as a form of self-protection (Herzog and Schmahl, 2018; Scottish Public Health Network, 2016; Peckins *et al.*, 2015). As such, it appears as though the compounded negative experiences had by many of the participants in key developmental stages could have contributed to a similar detachment displayed in their offending histories. Eric highlights how negatively influential these bonds can be towards individuals who are seeking validation and periods of belonging. Here Eric is primarily focused on how he wanted to appear 'competent' to the others, rather than explore how this experience may relate to his sexual offending history:

> I was sixteen, I went to this brothel…they hired me a prostitute…I didn't want to mess it up. (Eric)

Although experiences such as these were reported in isolation, the impact of being pressured into a sexual relationship in order to retain a position amongst the social group during emerging adulthood could have contributed to dysfunctional views on relationships and subsequent instances of sexual offending (Greathouse *et al.*, 2015). Just as violence and sexual abuse were viewed as acceptable acts in some of the participants' lives, traumas such as these could have been viewed as inevitable and therefore, treated with less urgency (Herzog and Schmahl, 2018; Peckins *et al.*, 2015).

A similar sense of detachment was conveyed by Jim when discussing his friends' suicide upon entering prison and the subsequent two deaths that had followed within twelve months of him being incarcerated:

> I know a boy who was in the army. I had my first sentence with him… he hung himself…things happen in here...i know three people who have died here (Jim)

Although Jim appeared to be detached from these experiences, he also cited a lack of support in relation to these experiences and others that related back to instances of abuse in childhood potentially contributing to his lack of urgency around accessing support for these losses. The informal way in which Jim discusses his numerous experiences of abuse, death and suicide could also be associated with his positive views towards violence and his extensive offending history (Moffitt *et al.*, 2013; Moskowitz, 2004).

In several of the participants' narrations of loss, a lack of emotional acknowledgment around traumatic events appeared evident. Eric further illustrated how even the death of his father could not elicit emotional feelings, even though his father was his primary care giver, who he cited several positive views of:

> Dad passed away and I didn't cry at all until the day of the funeral. It really hurt at the time but at the same time I was like numb for it (Eric)

Although several of the participants cited poor mental health, instances of self-harming and suicidal thoughts, there was a distinct lack of mention of mental health treatment and a general lack of mental health literacy which impacted the participants' transition into civilian life:

> I didn't know where to run. I was cutting myself and everything… Not just cutting, other things like burning myself with fags and stuff like that. (Lewis)

> I tried to get back on my antidepressants because I was having suicidal thoughts after leaving [the military]…I mean all I was doing was sleeping, that's all I was doing, and it was a bad patch. (Chris)

Research highlights that a failure to address singular or prolonged instances of trauma can increase vulnerability to depressive disorders, drug and alcohol addiction, and suicide, amongst other psychosocial and relationship challenges (Chapman *et al.*, 2004; Goldberg and Freyd, 2008). For several of the participants, a lack of support received during their military careers appeared to continue to influence an apprehension to engage in help seeking at the time of interview. As illustrated here, a history of not being able to access support contributed to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness in relation their mental health needs:

> I said to the doctor I've never really spoke about my issues but they just said there's your pills....they were just giving me loads and loads (Will)

> Well I asked and I was told that there was nothing...They can give you medication but I said I didn't want medication, I want somebody to talk, somebody to try and help me understand this. Nobody is available to speak to about this...there's no support. (Richard)

> So she [mum] presumes that because I've got mental health and Autism and all that, not being able to fit in she thinks that and drinking is part of the problem...I've never been able to form a relationship. (Jeffrey)

Importantly, the absence of support received during periods of vulnerability further embedded feelings of apprehension and frustration towards mental health professionals for several of the participants (Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen, 2010; Adams *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, several of the participants noted that had they received adequate care in time, their trajectories into incarceration may have been altered:

> I went to the doctors and I asked if I could speak to someone...Whether it was just the anger or with all the changes I was really anxious all the time...they just said. 'Could you wait?' but I needed to go... I felt I needed help...I didn't get it in time. (Eric)

> I've tried taking it to the mental health unit when I was in (location). And I even tried seeing someone and they're like, "No, you're fine." I said I'm not wired the same as other people...I stabbed the guy 14 times. (Lewis)

For those who experience prolonged exposure to trauma in childhood, the ability to maintain psychological resilience in adolescence and adulthood has been found to be extremely difficult, especially in period of high stress, such as military training or civilian re-integration (Chapman *et al.*, 2004; Goldberg and Freyd, 2008; Seery, 2011). As Findings Chapter One illustrated, many of the participants in this study experienced such exposure. And indeed, several of the participants revealed a propensity to develop self-harm and suicidal tendencies at particular stressful moments in their military service:

> You're thinking in Iraq you want somebody to just blast you right in the head. (Sean)

For the participants that reported combat experiences, the negative events witnessed in training and in combat were rarely reported as traumatic or influential to their poor mental health. In several narrations of traumatic events being witnessed, the majority of participants were under the age of twenty at the time of exposure. Here the participants highlight how these experiences were perceived and responded to at the time:

> I saw my pal get shot…in basic [training]…That was horrible. I was only 17 at a push at the time. (Max)

> Everything was going great until I had an accident, one of our pals was shot…it was all fun and games, toy soldier…all of a sudden, you deal with death, I was less than 50 feet away from them, you see them getting killed…It's a shock. Especially being so young. (Jeffrey)

Importantly, none of the participants who reported seeing death in combat or training scenarios reported the provision of mental health support. In fact, as Keith illustrated, the military further enforced views of hyper masculinity to the extent that he was shamed when experiencing periods of difficulty after a colleague died:

> I went to Iraq… A bunch of people died, I thought I want to see combat, this is what they don't tell you…but I'm scared… They just laughed and said, "Grow up." (Keith)

A further breach of trust was reported by Nick as contributing to his difficult transition out of military service. When Nick was under the age of eighteen, he was arrested for a criminal offense. For three years, Nick was unaware that there was an outstanding charge against him. Upon returning from Iraq, he was arrested by civilian police in front of his colleagues. It was during this experience where Nick reportedly began developing a negative view of the military as illustrated here:

> They arrested me right off the plane from Iraq for an old charge...It was terrible. I felt like I was hurt because I felt like I just done all of this...it's kind of like I was taken away in front of everyone, it was quite embarrassing... Just treated like a criminal. (Nick)

Almost instantly, Nick was isolated from his colleagues as his pre-enlistment 'antics' were no longer inconsequential and he would need to face formal civilian consequences. The findings align with research that explores compounded traumas involving social, interpersonal and institutional experiences which are viewed as betrayals or breaches of trust can negatively influence an individual's core view of the self (Lanius, Terpou and McKinnon, 2020). Subsequently, for nick, this experience contributed to negative views of the self, social isolation and a feeling of betrayal by the military instantaneously.

In a similar way to Nick, Matt expressed a view that it was his experiences in the military that contributed to his difficult life history. Here Matt illustrated that while he believes adversity in his childhood influenced his offending history, it was his time in the military that perpetuated his violent personality:

> I'm not saying the Army caused me to offend that's not- but it was a small part of a bigger jigsaw if that makes sense, there was things that I never did before I joined the army, I was never violent, never aggressive, and then within weeks of being in there, it was- I become a very different person. (Matt)

Whether the military was meeting their duty of care to these young men by inconsistently supporting them to get out of trouble with the criminal justice system is questionable. Had the priority been their mental health needs or addressing the offending behaviours with higher levels of accountability at the initial period of offending, the impact of their transitions may have been lessened. However, asking for help and accessing help is often a challenge unresolved for many with difficult life histories.

5.3.2 Something is not Right

The participants repeatedly narrated adverse experiences without seemingly recognising the impact these life events had on their life trajectories. Of the thirteen participants that reported symptoms related to PTSD (i.e. inability to emotionally regulate, hopelessness, avoidance, night terrors, hypervigilance), ten of those participants reported experiencing adverse childhood experiences prior to joining the military. As such, the findings align with research that suggests that those who experienced adversity in childhood may be vulnerable to the development of trauma related disorders such as PTSD, when compared to colleagues who lack pre-enlistment experiences of adversity (Schultebraucks *et al.*, 2020; Brewin, Andrews and Valentine, 2000). However, several of the participants cited a lack of mental health literacy and a lack of support as contributing to a deficit in what they know about themselves and their abilities to engage in positive relationships.

Following a return from military service, several of the participants cited their family members as encouraging them to seek out support for poor mental health and difficulties experienced in civilian life (i.e. divorce, addiction, and excessive alcohol use). Stephen and Lewis illustrate the seriousness of their families concerns and their apprehension for help seeking at that time:

> My mums always told me like ever since I got back from Afghanistan, you have to go see someone...they said, 'No you've not got post-traumatic stress disorder' but I could just never relate to them. (Stephen)

> I'd say "I'm still me, I'm still the same" but my Da says "No you haven't, you've changed" ... when I left, I came out, it felt different, like it didn't feel right. (Lewis)

For several of the participants, partners and ex-partners were cited as having concerns over the participants' poor mental health. However, as illustrated by Chris, the idea of formal support was often rejected:

> My ex-wife noticed that I had a lot of anger issues when I come to deal with things like this and she says hopefully it [counselling] will help, but I didn't go. (Chris)

However, several of the participants cited a lack of access to a formal mental health assessment or diagnosis as contributing to their lack of awareness about their own mental health:

> I've never been able to know if I have PTSD…I've always been paranoid. Now, I don't know if it's for being in Iraq and people trying to kill me or if it's the drugs...I've had some really hard dreams or vivid memories, I don't know which (Eric)

> Sometimes I've questioned myself am I snapping because of this and that, but I've never seen anything horrifically bad to even get PTSD or something like that… There was incidents happened in Iraq where I lost a couple of guys. (Matt)

Further, Will illustrates how a lack of support in this area can contribute to excessive alcohol use and increase an individual's vulnerability self-harming and suicide:

> I've never really spoke about my issues…the group sessions I didn't reveal why I was going to the drink and everything…I sat there at the start of my sentence and I almost, I had a rope and I was going to kill myself. (Will)

The absence of a mental health literacy was narrated with high frequency amongst the participants. Research has found that where instances of sexual offending are noted, a lack of mental health support can increase feelings of hopelessness leading to periods of self-harming and suicidal tendencies (Key *et al.*, 2021; Gonzalez and Connell, 2014). Consequently, the lack of knowledge in this area could be contributory to the propensity to offend illustrated by several of the participants as they continued to be unaware about the relationship between their lived experiences and their positionality as an offender.

Where the participants cited instances of loss during military service, it is apparent that a lack of mental health support at that time could have contributed to the participants difficulties adjusting to military life and subsequent offending histories. Lewis illustrates here how trauma impacted his military career, while also showcasing

how prevalent the lack of mental health support was in the military and in prison
institutions at that time:

> I never knew my friend died till we got back to camp…I talked to a couple of my boys but not a
> counsellor or nothing like that, like you're the first person that's actually sat down and listened
> to me and what I have to say. (Lewis)

A lack of mental health treatment during periods of trauma can further increase an
individual's vulnerability to trauma related symptoms (Center for Substance Abuse
Treatment, 2014). As such, several of the participants cited difficulties adjusting to
civilian life due to poor emotional regulation, hyper awareness and paranoia which
could be attributed to a lack of care during periods of high stress, childhood adversity
and trauma.

In several instances the participants cited poor sleep regulation and nightmares
as a difficulty they struggled with in their civilian lives. Illustrated here, Nick makes the
connection between poor sleep and negative cognition functioning:

> That's one thing that was bad for me, sleeping...Sometimes it's like I'd go a couple of days not
> really sleeping…I kind of like over think things…And always looking at the negatives with
> things instead of positives. (Nick)

Poor sleep, negative cognitions and an inability to healthily reframe negative cognitions
are cited in the research as contributory to low self-esteem, poor social relationships and
impulsivity that can be correlated with offending behaviours (Kamphuis *et al.*, 2012).
For the participants, poor sleep hygiene was cited alongside hyper awareness and
paranoia as a result of military training:

> I'd like to be aware of my surroundings...I think it's always been drummed in to me, probably
> through the army (Max)

Military culture engrained in the participants the requirement to self-regulate and
control not only their environment but their own symptomology in order to be
successful in combat situations especially. This is particularly relevant when exploring
the participants' experiences of anger and its use during military sanctioned experiences
of violence as illustrated by Jim and Stephen:

> A lot of anger. I think in the army you're exercising it. Pretty raged up to be honest. (Jim)

> Like sometimes bang, there's aggression… they were teaching me to be aggressive, you know
> what I mean? (Stephen)

During the participant interviews, difficulties with emotional regulation was discussed with the participants as a way to understand the prevalence of anger and aggression in their pre-enlistment lives and since leaving military service. As illustrated by Max and Lewis, they did not relate their military service history with their propensity to engage in periods of violence:

> I've always been angry and short tempered, the Army never made me any worst. (Max)

> I think that's what it is really. I'm just an angry young man. (Lewis)

Equally, both Eric and George illustrate how anger, left unresolved contributed to feelings of helplessness and a lack of control over their own wellbeing:

> I was angry and I was anxious. And I felt, I just felt quite not right, you know, all the time. (Eric)

> Well I've got a temper I know that and certain things just set me off and I try to avoid it, but when my temper goes, I just- I do stupid things. (George)

Further, instances of domestic violence were also cited with an apparent lack of acknowledgment around the seriousness of the offences. Here Nick and Lewis appear to lack a level of understanding around the relationship that exists between unresolved trauma, poor emotional regulations and dysfunctional views of violence:

> I wouldn't say it was extreme violence. I've got two domestic charges of abuse and that was it…It was not as if I've got anything against women, nothing like that. (Lewis)

> I've done a violent thing. I'm wouldn't say I'm an angry person. It's not really like I wouldn't say I'm angry…there wasn't really signs, it was… Maybe it was building up it's only because I'd held a few things…I've done a violent thing. I'm wouldn't say I'm an angry person. (Nick)

Importantly, when discussing instances of violence and sexual offences towards women and children, often the participants appeared to lack an understanding as to why they committed these sexual offences against women and children with a higher frequency:

> I understand how I got to maybe an offence but the reason why it's a woman…I've never hit a woman in my life, I never hit any of my victims, yes, I used shouting and physical violence, I never hit any of them or anything like that but I don't know that's one thing I can't explain it.(Jeffrey)

> I didn't understand what a sex offence was. Even until I got done with one. (Eric)

Although the intent of the research was not to explore the participants feelings in relation to their offences, several of the participants appeared unable to acknowledge the severity of their offences and the wider implications of their crimes to their families and

their victims. Illustrated below, Keith and Will discuss their offences with a primary focus on how the offences changed them:

> Maybe it wasn't rape but technically it was a rape, it was a blowjob. But that's classed as rape by law. But I just thought it was harsh, 11 years for what lasted one minute. (Keith)

> I'd been accused of raping her and that was that. I got remanded for a week…I was 19 at the time, and well, it was brutal. (Will)

While several of the participants cited views of remorse around their offences, Chris was the only participant who linked his offending history with previous instances of sexual abuse that he experienced in childhood. As illustrated here, Chris' narrations are similar in the other participants in that the focus of narrations around their offences focus on their experience of being a sexual offender:

> It's been difficult to come to terms with…especially surrounded by some that are guilty of similar, I've done even worse crimes than the thing that the guy did to me but I'm hoping that I will get help soon. (Chris)

The findings here align with the research that suggests that offending by some of the participants may derive from childhood traumas. As a result they appear to have the inability to form or manage intimate relationships, empathise with their victims or acknowledge the full ramifications of their actions (Greathouse *et al.*, 2015).

Throughout the narrations provided by the participants, unresolved traumas appeared to have been compounded by military service. Equally, the participants described a variety of experiences and psychological challenges that would have been extremely difficult to manage without psychological and emotional support. Witnessing colleagues dying in combat, experiencing consistent forms of bullying and having negative views of the overtly masculine training received, compounded already present instances of trauma and adversity. It is conjecture to assume that had the participants received timely support, their offending could have been prevented.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how influential military support or a lack thereof was to the participants' life trajectories. Several of the participants regretted joining the military, whereas several regretted leaving. The majority of participants cited regret around the way in which their military to civilian transitions occurred. Many cited feelings of frustration and anger, while others cited feelings of remorse and sadness. The common narrations around the excessive use of alcohol and the participants

relationship with violence was explored as a means to understand how several of the participants went from an active military life to periods of incarceration.

However, given the multitude of challenges narrated by the participants across the life course, it seems evident that intervention was needed for several of the participants prior to enlistment as a means to mitigate the challenges they would inevitably face in military life. Therefore, when the military enlisted them at a vulnerable period in their lives, the military should have assumed the participants may have needed additional support adjusting to military life. Lastly, as the military continues to recruit young people into military conscription, the military should be better prepared to support a range of veterans for the entirety of their lives.

Chapter Six: Findings Chapter Three

6.1 Introduction

Within this chapter, the findings explore the challenges of experiencing 'forced transitions' throughout the participants lives. Further, the findings explore the barriers to both help seeking and desistance through the participants eyes. The chapter concludes with participant led recommendations on how the military can best support those with difficult pre-enlistment life histories in order to support desistance during and after military service. Finally, the chapter includes an infographic which gives a visual overview of the lessons learned within the findings chapters as a way to bring the entirety of the findings to conclusion. The following themes are represented within this chapter: *Forced Transitions, Grin and Bear it,* and *Get a Grip*

6.2 Forced Transitions

The notion of transitioning has often been referred to in the context of being a linear experience that can occur in the context of development, life stages, in education or in employment (Dunlop, 2014). However, the participants' illustrated how transitions can often occur in tandem with key turning points, which often go unrecognised and unresolved. As such, many of the participants transitioned, often simultaneously between institutions (i.e. education, the family, the military, the prison system) while also transitioning through life stages (i.e. childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood) and identities (i.e. boy soldier, father, husband, soldier, failure, veteran, offender). Often without access to the reliable support systems required to facilitate positive transitional experiences (Forces in Mind Trust, 2022). Consequently, many of the participants' lacked the 'rules of engagement' held by each institution at any given time, which resulted in periods of isolation, loneliness, exclusion, and incarceration.

James highlights how the military rhetoric around the military being your primary family influenced his willingness to engage in help seeking when he was experiencing difficulties in his home life:

> I was torn as well…Because I'm not 100% right…They're making us choose between biological family and military family… you don't talk about family, you can talk about the job…the job is a job, and the family is sacred. (James)

These findings align with similar research that suggest that hurried and potentially unacknowledged transitions can arguably impact an individual's ability to cope with

their new life trajectories and identities (Wheaton, 1990; Abell, 2018; Grimell and van den Berg, 2020). As such, the conflicting messages regarded by the military around families caused many of the participants to experience feelings of being torn between the families they had built and the family they had joined. Keith illustrates a lack of confidence around help seeking with regard to family support:

> We don't know what we could or couldn't get help with…most of the time, would keep them at arm's length…then they'd get involved. (Keith)

In almost every life history recounted, the lack of support experienced by the participants appeared to embed feelings of low self-esteem and low views of themselves as a result of not being supported during these key turning points in their lives. As highlighted in the research, the often-unconscious act of transitioning through life stages and identities can lead to difficulties when going through these experiences unsupported and in conjunction with various other types of stressors, such a military training, combat or the civilian transition (Schwartz *et al.*, 2011; Wheaton, 1990; Copp *et al.*, 2019).

As a way to counteract these feelings, several of the participants aimed to build 'new families' through marrying and having children while still in the early stages of their military careers. Consequently, many of the participants transitioned from living in their childhood homes, to a bunker, to a home with a young family within twenty four months of joining the military[31]. However, when these transitions became overwhelming for several of the participants, the overtly masculine narratives that were present in the participants training experiences appeared to permeate into their personal lives:

> At one stage the family officer pulled me in and said like, "Oh, are you all right," … but it was more like you know the consequences sort of thing…they wait until you're already in the middle of a breakdown…He told me to 'cut my grass' to fix my marriage. (Matt)

As such, when Matt was required to hold several conflicting identities developed all within twelve months of enlisting (i.e. a young person, a soldier, a husband, a father), he perceived his CO's to be shaming him rather than supporting him. Previously, Matt had explored how his previous upbringing had contributed to his lack of communication skills and poor help seeking experiences hindering him from seeking out more active

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[31] As a demographical point, eight of the participants reported becoming parents to biological children before the age of twenty-three, three reported having step-children and one reported viewing his partners' child from a previous relationship as his child, each before the age of thirty.

support. Once more, these findings align with research that suggests that socioeconomically disadvantaged communities often experience inequality in relation to healthcare, education advancement and opportunities for social progression for children and young people. Leaving many without the positive experiences of help seeking needed to be successful later in life (Spijkers, Jansen and Reijneveld, 2012; Schneiders *et al.*, 2003). Without the encouragement and support needed to access the available support (presumably from the welfare support officer on base), many of the participants were left repeating cycles of poverty and insecurity they worked so tirelessly to escape as highlighted further:

> Money was a big issue…so we got told if we got married, we'd get a house…so that's how we've done it and it just crumbled almost instantly. (Matt)

Consequently for Matt, his lack of positive experiences of help seeking while in the military contributed to the breakdown of his marriage within a twelve month period, beginning a cycle of unhealthy behaviours that triggered his dissent out of the military.

Further, when participants cited family as a motivator to prematurely leave the military, several participants cited a lack of support as contributing to their lost military identities as they left under dishonourable circumstances:

> I went to my Sergeant and told three months to get out, felt like an eternity, plus, my girlfriend was pregnant at the time... so I just went AWOL. (Jim)

Where the participants cited a willingness to be part of relationships that were apparently detrimental for their military careers, the apparent trauma bonds developed in childhood were once again represented in their narrations. The lack of belonging and the difficulties experienced by the participants early in their careers appeared to contribute to them engaging in impulsive and potentially career ending acts as a means to feel some form of connectivity with their partners. Previously explored within the literature, *Trauma Bonds* are described as bonds that are formed through repeated cycles of abuse, devaluation and positive reinforcement. Both Sean and Lewis, illustrated how they were willing to risk their military careers and potentially face incarceration in the MCTC in order to see their partners at the time, who were similar in age and from similar socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds:

> I can remember I went Awol in Ireland only because I wanted to be with my bird [partner]. (Sean)

> I went AWOL for four months or so just to be with em [partner]. (Lewis)

The participants previous childhood experiences could have led to them to having a higher vulnerability to the development of dysfunctional views on relationships and family, thus making them more vulnerable to holding onto any relationships in their lives, healthy or otherwise (Rikhye *et al*., 2008; Tambelli, *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, the findings suggest that the participants' with early experiences of trauma may have been more vulnerable to developing *trauma bonds* with their partners specifically, which may ultimately have negatively influenced their life transitions, as these bonds could have altered their trajectories through premature marriage or childrearing (Rikhye *et al*., 2008; Tambelli, *et al.*, 2015).

For many of the participants, difficult home lives were repeatedly reported by the participants as a direct consequence of their forced transition into marriage. As such, several of the participants felt the military 'forced' them to transition into adulthood through marriage as a means to gain access to housing. However, these experiences were often followed by impactful divorce proceedings that could have been avoided had the military not insisted that the participants be married prematurely in order to access housing and welfare services as illustrated by Nick:

> She just divorced me on her own, I didn't know about it...I come back from Iraq three or four months later and I'm not even sure where she is. (Nick)

Additionally, the breakdown of interpersonal relationships were cited by several of the participants has being key contributors to poor mental health and premature discharge from the military. In Stephen's case, the identity he formed for himself while in combat was significantly impacted by the breakdown of his relationship:

> Like when I went to Afghanistan, she got pregnant…I found out it wasn't mine, I think that's probably what made me feel bad initially I think that's what fucked me up a wee bit. (Stephen)

Losing yet another identity (i.e. father and husband), Stephen then began struggling in his military duties and consequently, the struggle to retain his military identity began. These findings align with the research that suggests that early developmental experiences of trauma can affect an individual's ability to judge interpersonal relationships, which can result in poor or unstable relationships (Main, 1996; For-Wey, Fei-Yin and Bih-Ching, 2002). As Stephen was seventeen at the time of marriage, it could be assumed he was not prepared for the demands of so many complex identities (i.e. father, husband, soldier).

Further, for several of the participants, there was an apparent lack of secure relationships noted throughout their military lives which influenced their military careers and their subsequent incarceration. Where leaving the military was cited as contributory to offending behaviours, several of the participants cited their wives or partners as influential in their premature transitions out of the military. These experiences compounded several different types of stressors for the participants as they were having to choose between the family they 'made' and the family they 'joined' as highlighted here:

> I was getting hassled by her (wife) all the time to leave…I didn't want to but I did anyway. (Keith)

> My girlfriend was pregnant at the time…She said 'I'll be behind you no matter what you decide', but when I got out, she was saying 'I'd rather you stayed in the army', but hindsight is a beautiful thing isn't it? (Jim)

Similarly to Keith, Jim was pressured to leave the military by his then partner, which he acknowledges was not the correct decision for him at the time. Jim further illustrated how the need to belong and the need to be part of a family negatively influenced their transitions out of military service. The findings suggest that conflicting pressure between the military and family can ultimately led to negative life trajectories.

Importantly, much of the socio-economic backgrounds of the participants' partners was not explored at depth. The participants did give some insight into the age of their partners at the time of marriage and childbearing and many give insights into the context in which their relationships were formed. Therefore, it could be assumed that if the partners were equally seeking to escape similarly chaotic backgrounds, they may have also experienced difficulties with impulsivity, poor emotional regulation and difficulty adjusting to military life, which could have compounded the negative experiences of family reported by the participants (Jardine, 2017; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Pratt and Cullen, 2000).

Although narrations of families often ended in stories of divorce, separation and incarceration, the participants appeared to be able to separate those experiences from their views of family in general. As such, knowing their children and their families continue to support them while incarcerated appeared very impactful for them, as illustrated here:

> Compared to guys in here, the guys who come into prison and they'll lose everything, they'll lose their family, I'm lucky. (Matt).

> My family, everything. I love my family…Id' be Lawless, wouldn't care… I think I'd just be here I think for life. (Stephen)

Interestingly, for some participants where instances of neglect and abuse were noted previously, having family support while incarcerated seemed to erase the impact of those experiences. As illustrated by Will and Lewis, the provision of support by family superseded numerous narratives of physical violence and abuse that was experienced earlier in their lives:

> What I've done is not nice and for someone close to me to say 'Regardless of what you've done, I want to be there for you, tell me anything'…I'd be totally fucked if it wasn't for my mum, dad and brother and girlfriend and stuff like that, so. And I'm one of the luckier ones, I've got people out there, there's folk in here who have fuck all. (Jim)

> I've had two fights since I've been here. But that's stopped now because I got a letter from the missus saying you fucking pack it in. I need you out here. (Lewis)

The ability to redefine what family represents for the participants in their current life stage, rather than through the lens of their childhood experiences allowed some of the participants to acknowledge the benefit that families can provide during challenging periods:

> Despite the bad living that I've put on, what I really want in life is a family…your family that you're born into, by a certain age that's not a good thing anymore…But the family you made for yourself, that's where your heart needs to be better. That's where you need to put your time and effort. (Lewis)

To view the family through a dichotomous lens of being both a help and a hindrance allows for the nuances between how families are represented and viewed across the life span to be explored. The analysis found that the presence of family in the now, coupled with the potential for a family in the future could serve as a deterrent for future offending. While this was true for some, for many of the participants, joining the military was meant to replace the families which they felt they lacked. Unfortunately, much of their expectations were not met and the participants spent stages of early adulthood suffering through periods of addiction, poor mental health and isolation. Consequently, the military failed at protecting the participants not as soldiers but as young people, and they were once again let down by an institution they should have been able to rely on.

While the military may have had good intentions by enforcing policies that dictate an individual must be in a specified type of relationship in order to access housing and support, the military is assuming the individual is developed and responsible enough to

make these key life decisions. However, as research highlights, individuals with experiences of trauma, adversity and limited support systems are more likely to engage in impulsive and complex behaviours (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Pratt and Cullen, 2000). Therefore, it is incumbent on the military to demonstrate how they are not exploiting vulnerable recruits through disadvantageous policies. Importantly, as the military continues to shift its' identity from institution to organisation, policies that place the provision of support on a hierarchal and patriarchal pedestal should be challenged. As such, the military should consider the impact of forcing transitions through marriage, through geographical exploitations and through the promise of a more prosperous life than it can provide.

6.3   Grin and Bear it

The analysis found that the barriers to help seeking could not be attributed to a single phenomenon. Socially, the participants cited group dynamics and poor interpersonal relationships as limiting their willingness to ask for help. Environmentally, a lack of help seeking was attributed to not having physical access to support due to difficult home environments, living in socio economically deprived areas with little government support, or being in literal combat zones with no support on site. Culturally, participants cited military culture and 'lad' culture as a hindrance to help seeking. Psychologically, the participants cited feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and fear as key barriers to help seeking.

Consequently, every corner of the participants' lives was permeated with barriers to help seeking. The following section will explore those experiences and examine how barriers such as these can impair the military to civilian transition through the subthemes: *Indestructible Barriers, Inescapable Isolation* and *Unidentifiable.*

6.3.1   Indestructible Barriers

For the majority of the participants, barriers to help seeking were often linked to their identities as soldiers, as independent adults and as men. The following section will explore how any perceived challenges to the participants' identities were seen as too threatening to confront. As illustrated by Max, the lack of a stable home environment contributed to an absence of help seeking during periods of stress as he did not want to risk his position amongst the collective:

> If someone like me who couldn't go back home and didn't have anything, you wouldn't want to look weak in front of the peer group. (Max)

Max presented an awareness around his level of vulnerability at the time and subsequently, was aware of the risks he was taking by not asking for help in periods of distress. However, the potential to be seen as 'weak' over rid any internal drive to ask for help when he was struggling with poor mental health.

Through the constant narration of overtly masculine views on help seeking, the military limits an individual's willingness to engage in help seeking as individuals may be less likely to risk their 'standing' amongst their peers as illustrated by Keith:

> We're scared because what if we'll be judged…I didn't want to appear weak. (Keith)

Further, Stephen highlights how help seeking may have hindered his collective standing:

> Yeah, just think it's not in lad culture to say you've got a problem. (Stephen)

As several of the participants were still in their emerging adulthood stages and contesting with already challenging identities (i.e. young person, soldier, father, and husband), the loss of their social identity was unfathomable (Reit, 2017; Fox and Pease, 2012; Hoge *et al.*, 2004). Importantly, as emerging adulthood is the period between childhood and adulthood in which social bonds are an intrinsic part of identity development, the participants would have been unwilling to risk their social status and their personal identity as 'lads' in exchange for support (See: Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008; Sokol, 2009).

In addition to this, variations of shame and fear could have compounded feelings of vulnerability that may have been present in their pre-enlistment lives, which further put their military identities at risk as they could not appear 'weak'. For military masculinity is unique in its' distinct form of cultural identity, which emphasises physical strength, violence, subordination (Green *et al.*, 2010; Reit, 2017). Research that explores military identity has found that masculine values are commonly perpetuated around mental health fitness and self-reliance, which have been found to discourage collective views of 'weakness' or 'vulnerability' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Belkin, 2012; Reit, 2017).

As previously stated by several of the participants, there was a presence of complex relationships within combat situations noted where participants did not always feel

physically safe with their CO's and other recruits. Therefore, being seen to engage in help seeking and subsequently appearing weak, could also have been viewed by the participants as potentially dangerous to not only their internal worldviews but their physical safety. Further highlighting how the consistent presence of military masculinity could have served as a barrier to accessing support.

For several of the participants, the overtly masculine narratives enforced during their military careers hindered their willingness to engage in help seeking, as a result of such action would diminish their manhood:

> I think the way we are taught, it's not like they say don't ask for help, it's just kind of that's implied…you're not going to really ask for help if you're a man. (Jeffrey)

Max's view on weakness, emotional vulnerability, and masculinity were present in several of the participants' narrations. Consequently, many of the participants felt that their primary identity of being a 'man' took precedence over their mental health, military career and family as illustrated here:

> They felt I was all right because I always put on a bit of a brave face. I didn't want their help but I did. (Nick)

> My problem is I don't like asking anybody for support. (Sean)

For Nick, a barrier to him accessing support could be contributed to a lack of support in his home life. Nick recognised that he 'put on a brave face' but also appears to imply that it could have been obvious to those close to him that he was in need of support. For Sean, the apprehension to engage in help seeking is what he referred to as a 'problem'. One in which it appeared as though he was aware of at the time of his military service. For several of the participants, the apprehension to engage in help seeking could be linked back to internal feelings around 'worthiness' or 'being deserving'. Further, the experiences of breached trust experienced in their pre-enlistment and military lives may have contributed to feeling as though the participants were not safe in asking for help.

As such, the consistent narrative of being told 'man up' as cited by the participants in every interview, betrayed the militaries argument that they are committed to foster an environment where health, emotions and emotional development are taught and facilitated (Ministry of Defence, 2017). Furthermore, the participants' interpretation of the military's view on help seeking challenged their identity as 'real men',

consequently, putting them at greater risk (Reit, 2017; Fox and Pease, 2012; Hoge *et al.*, 2004).

Further, the presence of a cultural stigma around accessing mental health support and drug and alcohol addiction support led to a lack of help seeking for the participants who had served longer terms in the military:

> I just kind of dealt with it ourselves… I mean even in like, '97, there was no real mental health problems in the world. (Max)

> I've never had a problem with drugs, but as soon as you tell them something like that. They just treat like you're a drug user. (Richard)

As belonging was an intrinsic motivator to join the military for several of the participants, a risk to their social identities as a consequence of judgement received for the type of support they required appeared unconscionable for the participants at that time (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008; Sokol, 2009).

Importantly, for one participant, the barrier to help seeking extended beyond any internal narratives and was perceived to be an issue of physical safety due to his deployment to Northern Ireland. Keith illustrates how engagement with help seeking can be hindered by external drivers, outside of the military's control:

> It was difficult. I don't know who to talk to. If I talked to someone it was "Shut up, go to someone else, you're nothing but a baby killer, if you are an Army man, you're scum''…So I just keep myself to myself. (Keith)

For several of the participants, the negative associations with help seeking compounded by actual negative experiences of help seeking, created a barrier too difficult to overcome. Consequently, the lack of timely support left many of the participants vulnerable to developing further insecure views of themselves, unchecked and dangerous views of violence and negative views of the future, as many of them were new to civilian life when their difficulties arose.

Interestingly, reading illiteracy was cited as a barrier to help seeking for several of the participants. For several of the participants, the inability to access the physical materials that supported mental health awareness further stigmatised the help seeking process. Jeffrey illustrates how poor literacy skills meant physically reading the flyers that advertised support was difficult for him:

> I'm not saying there wasn't maybe there if you asked, but it wasn't easy to read the card. (Jeffrey)

The research acknowledges how low literacy can influence an individual's willingness to engage with written information and complex instructions (Mayor, 2012; Dewalt *et al.*, 2004). However, navigating identity development, social inclusion, military culture and difficulties physically accessing the support materials appeared to make asking for help untenable for many of the participants. As such, several of the participants cited a refusal to attempt to read the support flyers in the first instance as illustrated by Lewis:

> I can not read so well…So I think there's been posters on like that stuff… I mean you don't stop to read them to see what they are. You just head on. (Lewis)

Literacy was particularly noteworthy in relation to how individuals with reported low literacy skills reported their experiences with help seeking. Eric appeared angry at how the military claimed there was a provision of support available to recruits. However, here he illustrates that he felt the military provided flyers that talked about help but they were shallow attempts to support the participants:

> The army said there were flyers up. Protecting themselves… I wasn't going to blame it on the army…I didn't know that was any help to this. There's never a thing I've looked to the army. (Eric)

The lack of accessible support led to feelings of mistrust in the militaries ability to provide for the participants who were more vulnerable to negative transitional experiences (Easton, Entwistle and Williams, 2013). As such, a commonly overlooked barrier to the participants' ability to engage in help seeking appeared to be an inability to communicate their mental health needs, as well as an inability to access physical materials that required strong literacy skills (Easton, Entwistle and Williams, 2013).

6.3.2 Inescapable Isolation

For the majority of the participants, less serious instances of offending while in the military were reported with a high prevalence. However, the majority of these instances were viewed as getting into 'trouble', rather than as continued instances of offending. Consequently, professional and social isolation was not cited as a consequence of such 'troubles', until more serious offences were made public knowledge. For six of the participants in the study, media representation contributed to periods of social isolation from their military colleagues, family, friends and their wider community. Consequently, the 'moral panic' around their offences was experienced as

'public humiliation'. Subsequently, swift periods of isolation occurred, further increasing the participants difficulties:

> I went to football training…Everyone had a Sun paper in their front windscreen with Jack the Ripper and I just said yeah, good, funny, real army mentality is to take the piss. (Will)

For Will, the loss of his military friends, experiences of public humiliation and feelings of shame were compounded by the loss of a relationship with his family members:

> I couldn't even bring myself to tell them everything and the papers printed stuff that…papers printed that I'd been on the sex offenders register since before I was …She (mum) was like that's not true what they printed here, but my sister believed it without challenge. (Will)

Although Will highlights how his mum was less likely to engage with the media reports, he reported an instant disconnect from the rest of his family. Given the difficult pre-enlistment experiences of the participants (i.e. low literacy, abuse, maltreatment, and poverty), the lack of support received during these periods triggered a critical internal conflict between two very different identities, that of an emerging adult needing help and that of a soldier needing to showcase a form of self-reliance (Engebretson, 2007; Green *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, many of the participants who experienced the consequences of this type of 'moral panic', actually more of a risk than they had been previously. As they had no social supports, no military support, and no internal resilience to protect them from further offending (Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019).

As several of the participants cited numerous instances of less serious offending throughout their military lives, many of the participants reported feeling as though they were inadequately prepared for the transition from 'soldier' to 'offender' (Murray, 2013; Mottershead, 2019). The swiftness in which the participants transitioned between being seen as a soldier and being seen as an offender led to further confliction about how the participants could situate themselves within the military once their offending histories were exposed:

> I was getting called Jack the Ripper and, you know, you try and laugh it off because you don't want people to see it's affecting you. (Will)

For the participants who were charged with serious and sexual offences, it was apparent that a lack of help seeking had further influenced their poor mental health and compounded the unresolved internal conflicts potentially contributing to the types of offences they were involved with:

> It's because of the nature of the offence, see if it had of been an assault, hitting a guy in a pub sure but when it comes to this…Think of talking is one thing but to talk about it is different. I've never really spoke about it. (Eric)

> I hope like, yourself don't judge me because I'm in for a sex offence charge. I'm trying to hide it because as soon as I mention about sex offence charge I'm done. (Keith)

In many regards, the participants appeared unaware that given the nature of their offences, they too would experience trauma related symptoms as a result of their offences (Cowan, 2014). As such, the findings align with research that suggests that where individuals commit offences regarded as 'against their nature', there are several barriers to desistance and mental health recovery such as shame, social isolation and physical symptoms such as sleeplessness, emotional dysregulation and hypervigilance (Cowan, 2014).

Consequently, several participants cited an apprehension to engage with family support due to the swift way in which they were transitioned out of the military:

> I thought it was never the right time to talk to my family, I just wanted to keep it to myself and I didn't want to say anything. (Matt)

The findings align with research that suggests that social isolation following disengagement from family and community settings has been found to increase the risk of recidivism for those who have been charged with sexual offences (Bailey and Klein, 2018; Hirschi, 1969; Levenson and Cotter, 2005). Importantly, Will previously discussed how detention in the priory began a cycle of offending for him. However, it was only when discussing family support did the notion of shame arise:

> I was ashamed because I didn't tell my family I was in the priory…I felt like a failure… Absolutely disgusted with myself and ashamed of what I'd done and ashamed that I couldn't cope. (Will)

Research has found that decisions to withdraw from society and interpersonal relationships, as Will did, can isolate an individual further. Consequently, limiting the quality and quantity of existing and potential social bonds and diminishing feelings of belonging (Bailey and Klein, 2018; Braithwaite, 1989).

As media representation can increase the publics misconception about sexual offending and recidivism, several of the participants felt as though their personal safety was at risk from 'vigilantes' or strangers in their communities (DiBennardo, 2018; Krinsky, 2016; Lancaster, 2011). Sean and Jim illustrate how a lack perceived lack of

physical safety contributed to a lack of psychological safety present in their lives while
they were awaiting their court cases:

> I thought there was going to be vigilantes coming through my door because it was in the
> papers… So, it was bringing a lot of attention that I didn't want. (Sean)

> Fellas would say 'Oh you're him'…because anytime I got into trouble, I was on the front page
> of the papers. Footballer jailed for assault, soldier jailed for assault. (Jim)

Research explores the discourse around the use of public protection orders as a means to
rationalise the use of social media, television, radio and newspaper outlets to report
information about individuals who have been charged with sexual offences
(DiBennardo, 2018; Krinsky, 2016; Lancaster, 2011). For four of the six participants[32]
who experienced public recognition for their offences, formal charges were yet to be
filed when the media made reports about them. Consequently, these participants were
lacking in legal representation, had not spoken with their families about their offences
and were not prepared for the quick discharge they received. Subsequently, several of
the participants were left with compounded feelings of shame and social stigmatisation
that arose from their 'dishonourable' behaviour while in the military:

> I was all over the front page ''hero to zero'' because I'd done Iraq and then kind of got myself
> involved with organised crime. (Nick)

As illustrated by Sean, the lack of social interaction and fear of retaliation from the
community in which he used to belong, led to feelings of disconnect that further
enforced already dominant feelings of hopelessness and loneliness that were present
throughout many of the participants life histories:

> The only thing that was supporting me was a machete…I was getting paranoid so I started
> reacting; I was getting drunk, because I thought, might as well be drunk. (Sean)

As such, the findings align with the research that explores how drug and alcohol misuse
can increase the likelihood of recidivism of those charged with sexual offences due to
negative emotionality and intimacy deficits (Abracen *et al.*, 2006). As such, several of
the participants appeared to use drugs and alcohol as a means to disassociate from the
challenges they were experiencing at the time. Further, the increased level of offender
shame experienced by many of the participants became so disintegrative that the
participants often reported a dissociation from any hope of community re-integration,

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[32] As a point of demographic context: Jim, Matt, Will, and Sean reported receiving media recognition
for their offences prior to formal court proceedings beginning.

further justifying periods of recidivism in their minds (See: Bailey and Klein, 2018; Klein, Rukus, and Zambrana, 2012; Hosser, Raddatz and Windzio, 2007). The deeply rooted levels of shame that came from leaving the military early, being charged with sexual offences and being socially isolated were compounded by the media to a point in which it would have been very difficult for the participants to recover from without external support (Harper and Hogue, 2014; Zatkin, Sitney and Kaufman, 2021; Bailey and Klein, 2018). As such, the media, social supports and community support were found to be both motivators towards and away from desistance for many of the participants.

6.3.3 Unidentifiable

> ''They didn't ask if you were a veteran, they asked were you in the army. I mean I'm not a veteran.'' (Jim)

Jim highlights a sentiment that was shared by thirteen of the fifteen participants. One in which being in the military does not equate to being a veteran. Subsequently, the analysis uncovered that many of the barriers to help seeking reported by the participants were rooted in a lack of veteran identity. Common barriers to the development of a veteran identity included age, combat experience, and time served in the military. Where age was cited as a barrier to representing themselves as a veteran, the participants often cited a negative self-perception of their time in service due to a lack of combat experience as illustrated by Stephen:

> I'm not a veteran who's been in world wars… that's what you need to do to be classed as a veteran … Just because I'm so young…I done my bit when I was 18. (Stephen)

Will and Jeffrey further illustrate how age can influence views of military service and veteran identity:

> I definitely paid my dues but I'm not a veteran…I just feel so young and that I just don't know. I feel like I was an infant when I was in Afghan. (Will)

> I did serve, but I'm not really a soldier…I actually haven't went to combat because I haven't done the job that I trained to do because I was a boy soldier. (Jeffrey)

The lack of a veteran identity appears to have compounded an internal confliction about what attributes exist in a 'veteran' in the 21st century, as many of the participants' service histories lacked combat experience and ended prematurely as highlighted here:

> I don't go to any of the army charities. I think charities are for folk who are injured only. (Sean)

These findings align with previous research that suggests that the loss of a core identity (i.e. the military identity), can negatively influence and potentially compound already present feelings of isolation and loneliness (Dandeker *et al.*, 2006; Flack and Kite, 2021). Therefore, there is an increased risk of identity disassociation that can occur when participants feel as though their time in military service was not 'adequate' or if the individual leaves the military under negative circumstances (Dandeker *et al*., 2006; Flack and Kite, 2021). Consequently, many of the participants did not engage with appropriate support due to the lack of a strong veteran identity and subsequent social isolation from military colleagues where serious offences were noted as illustrated by Max:

> I just felt like I was on my own. I've been out the army for a few years by then so why would go back to the army to get any support. (Max)

Several participants cited a lack of opportunity for support or knowledge about veteran support as contributing to their difficulties during the military to civilian transition. Stephen and Richard highlight how difficult it is to support the veteran population as there is often a disconnect in communication that occurs between early service leavers, transitional support services and the criminal justice system:

> I had no idea what I was doing and nobody to speak to. If I had known that there was veterans help that would have been able to help me that would've been a whole lot different story but nothing really. (Stephen)

> The veterans say that there is lots of assistance available, but there's nothing…especially once you're in prison. (Richard)

Importantly, for those who did report transitional support, formal acknowledgement about the participants' veteran status at the time of discharge may have lessened periods of social isolation which were often cited as contributory to several of the participants offending histories.

Importantly, some of the participants had difficulty situating themselves between their current positionality of 'offender' and their prior 'veteran' identity, which was alleviated by periods of belonging experienced in incarceration as illustrated by Stephen:

> Most of the guys I know now in the jail are veterans….they are like me. (Sean)

Research that explores the risks to incarcerated veterans when disclosing their military service has found that an apprehension to self-report as a veteran is centred in fears around retaliation, violence, and a loss of privileges. For many of the participants, the perceived risks of identifying as a veteran were outweighed by experiencing periods of comradery and kinship in an environment that is known for social isolation (Albertson, Irving and Best, 2015; Mottershead, 2019). As such, within the scope of the veterans groups, the participants were able to relive stories of training and life in service, while putting aside their 'offender' identity for a brief period time and build a community which they lost when leaving the military as illustrated by Sean:

> I know I'm a veteran, aye but it's just a weird thing being so young being classed as that… But it lets the boys here know I was in the army and all that. (Stephen)

As the participants were often contending with several identities at one time, the ability to disassociate from the 'offender' identity in order to connect with the 'veteran' identity was seen as a key contributor to their overall wellbeing while incarcerated (Cooper *et al.*, 2017). The ability to hold both identities was found to be important for several of the participants as this increased their opportunities for social engagement in a notoriously socially isolated environment. Interestingly, the participants who were incarcerated for sexual offences expressed conflicting views on how they experience being a veteran and a sexual offender:

> I trust a veteran more than I trust a sex offender but I am a sex offender...Most of the veterans I know are sex offenders. I'm in the situation where I know how wild the army is. (Eric)

> I've dishonoured the regiment, I've caused the problem, I'm the one that's brought shame against my regiment, I don't really kind of deserve to be around them. (Jeffrey)

While those who were incarcerated for violence or drug related offences expressed positive views about their time in prison and in their military career:

> I'm still proud of what I've done. Yeah, I would say I'm proud. (Matt)

The analysis found that the lack of a strong military identity, compounded with feelings of isolation and conflict about the validity of their military histories contributed to lack of help seeking that extended beyond their time in the military. The notion of being alone or undeserving of help from the military further propelled the participants deeper into periods of isolation. These periods of isolation ultimately were cited as contributory to future periods of recidivism. Interestingly, the participants who expressed positive views of their service were more likely to express an ongoing sense of pride for the

military histories, while citing a willingness to engage with support and a willingness share insights on their views of desistance. For the participants who cited feelings of shame in relation to their offences and their limited time in service, an apprehension to access support was cited along with pessimistic views of desistance and community re-integration.

6.4   Fragile Futures

For thirteen participants, instances of youth offending were reported prior to joining military service. The majority of narrations of offending included acts that were committed as a part of a social group and as a means to belong when the participants were experiencing difficulties at home. Research has found that root contributors to recidivism for underrepresented prison populations, such as military personnel, are grounded in their personal and community relationships. The absence of a positive social identity and a feeling of social connectedness can counteract the benefits of stable housing, employment and mental health, leaving many at risk of re-offending (Stone, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 2003). For the participants in this study, it appeared that many of them were stuck in a cycle of offending as a means to belong, becoming isolated as a result of offending and then offending further as a result of isolation. These patterns were incredibly difficult and at times, impossible to break. Therefore, this section will explore how the participants understood their offending histories at the point of incarceration and their views of desistance through the following subthemes: *No Easy Solution* and *Challenging Inevitabilities.*

6.4.1   No Easy Solution

Challenges to desistance are often mitigated by an individual's view of their offending history. For example, how an individual views the severity of their offence, how they refer to their victims and how they speak about the potential to re-offend can be an indicator of their likelihood of re-offending (Stone, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 2003). Two of the fifteen participants mentioned their victims as a means to display remorse, with the remaining mentioning their victims in the context of describing the charges against the participants. While many of the participants verbally recognised their offending histories were extensive, the majority appeared to convey their experiences with a sense of ambiguity towards the impact and those who were affected as illustrated by Max:

> My whole life I've had kind of spirals…I'm in a really, really like, terrible bad place, and I've done a lot of bad things in my life. Things that could've got me a way longer sentence than this. (Max)

It remained unclear as to whether Max conveyed his experiences with a sense of detachment as a means of self –protection or as a means to invite conversations about the periods he went without support, which could have led to his offending. In this excerpt, Max is not simply illustrating a sense of ambiguity towards his offending and how he has 'gotten away' with many of the 'bad' things he has done. Max is also illustrating how throughout numerous periods in his life, he has experienced a form a mental turmoil that went unsupported. Similar sentiments of 'I am a bad guy' were often combined with the sentiment of 'I was the victim' throughout the majority of the interviews. The ways in which these insights and experiences were conveyed highlights how influential opportunities to engage in conversations about mental health and around adverse lived experiences can be towards the process of desistance for individuals with difficult life histories (Stone, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 2003).

Throughout the entirety of the participant interviews, as well as a lack of mental health literacy, it appeared that many of the participants lacked any form of reflective thoughts on how their early life histories could have contributed to their offences. Illustrated by Jeffrey, a lack of understanding around how he committed his offences more than five years after the event remains a vital part of his narrative around his offending:

> I know the reasons why I could have got there to hurting someone, but to do that, it doesn't make sense. (Jeffrey)

The lack of consistent positive role models, positive educational and employment experiences and mental health support experienced throughout the participants' lives appears to have stunted many of the participants' ability to be independently reflective about their offences These findings align with the research that suggests that where individuals lack the opportunity to engage in various forms of reflective actions as a means to understand their lived experiences, they are more likely to experience vulnerabilities to poor mental health (Stone, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 2003).

For two participants in particular, feelings of shame appeared to be an impossible barrier to mitigate without the appropriate level of mental health and social support. Further, as highlighted here, external factors, such as family narrations of shame compounded the impact of their offences on their internal narratives:

> My mum and that tells me how I was before. I'm not that person. (Keith)

> Because my dad's straighter than a line so coming in here… he was sat and just goes that his whole life…I've never been in prison my life and now I'm visiting you. So, I'm like ashamed. (Matt)

While the participants note the importance of having their families support during periods of incarceration, the presence of shame was noted to have the potential to contribute to maladaptive behaviours, poor psychological development and increased rates of recidivism (Tangney, Stuewig and Martinez, 2014). Therefore, shame should be looked at through the lens of being 'reintegrative' rather than 'disintegrative', with a focus on helping those involved with the criminal justice system to see shame as a motivator towards desistance and not away from the process (Braithwaite, 1989). However, the ability to address these feelings comes from opportunities to engage in safe and reflective practice, often experienced within the confines of formal mental health counselling settings which are often limited to incarcerated veterans.

However, the participants have cited on numerous occasions a lack of opportunities to explore their lived experiences as a means to desist:

> I've been waiting five months for counselling even though I have a background of abuse. (Scott)

The absence of prioritised mental health treatment combined with the lack of targeted resources further embedded a feeling of institutional betrayal by those in positions of authority:

> I asked for counselling…they said "No we don't do anything like that" so I said, "What so you just want me to look at the wall and rub my stomach kind of relaxing?'' (Nick)

These breaches of institutional trust have occurred across the majority of the participants' life course.

> The social worker here says to me it's not normal to have three members of the same family that are sex offenders…I don't know if in the back of my mind I've had problems from my brother and father being sex offender. (Sean)

Sean illustrates how continuous breaches of trust by individuals the participants viewed as in positions of power (i.e. social workers, CO's, parents, educators) influenced a lack of awareness around the relationships that exist between his offending histories and difficult upbringing. As Sean shared his life history, it was apparent that Sean's first breach of trust was experienced by his family when he was sexually abused by his brother and father, his second was by his first social worker who did not remove him

from the home, his third was from the military when he went unsupported following traumatic experiences after combat and while incarcerated, when asking for support Sean was offered criticism rather than help. Across Sean's entire life course, he has been betrayed by institutions and individuals who have been in the position to support him and have not.

Although many of the participants cite feelings of being let down throughout their lives, some felt that feelings of being let down by the prison institution was the most influential to their futures. The notion of shame and experiences of perceived public humiliation were cited alongside negative feelings of employment opportunities and community re-integration. Will highlights how his prior relationships hinder him from developing any further skills while incarcerated:

> My two best friends from school, they're prison officers in (local town)… They offered me courses in there, but I told them I said I said I can't go. So there's nothing for me to do. (Will)

Alongside targeted mental health support, employment support is particularly impactful as employment can serve as a positive turning point that leads to new feelings of social connectedness and feelings of optimism (Salvatore and Taniguchi, 2012). As a result of feeling contributory to society, those with a history of offending benefit significantly through opportunities to transform their former identities as 'offenders' (Hazel, 2017; Ramakers *et al.*, 2017). However, as Nick has illustrated a lack of these opportunities can lead to feelings of disillusionment and apparent frustration:

> I only done a construction course in here…it's like building spaghetti towers with marshmallows. My future is Pointless. (Nick)

Where employment opportunities are limited to those with a history of offending, community engagement through volunteering or apprentice programmes are advocated for as a means of reconnecting an individual with their former community (Hazel, 2017; McCartan and Kemshall, 2020). For the majority of the participants, the inability to see a positive future following incarceration was seen as a deterrent from engaging in the necessary support needed to desist. Several participants illustrate how feeling as though their futures are pre-determined due to their offending histories influences their views of community re-integration and desistance:

> I'm never ever going to get a job, nobody's going to look at me for relationships or anything like that you know, and its knowing that that's what I have to go out to. (Scott)

> I'm never ever going to get a job, nobody's going to look at me for relationships or anything like that you know, and its knowing that that's what I have to go out to and you don't have that like to keep you going. (Chris)

> Whether I feel good about it or whether I try and make the best of it, I'm still going to be here regardless… It's not looking good. I'll be on the sex offender's registry. I just want to work. I just want to get out. (Eric)

For these participants, the lack of hope contributed to feelings of hopeless and fear about their futures. Without having any type of positive interactions, relationships or experiences to look forward to, several of the participants appear to have a higher level of vulnerability to recidivism simply as a means to avoid further periods of loneliness and isolation.

Importantly, the type of social support that contributes to positive views towards desistance is not limited to family and friends as noted here by Richard and Stephen. Where a return to families and friends was cited as unlikely, other forms of social support were noted by a few of the participants. In particular, future engagement with veterans' charities was highlighted as essential to the participants' wellbeing, due to the feeling of being understood and supported:

> I've spoke to the veterans and they've offered me loads of help, so I'm happy that way. If I didn't have them I would be gone. (Stephen)

> I feel better now at the moment as I've got more opportunities leaving prison as I did leaving the army. I've got more support and more folk willing to assist me, and try and make sure that nothing like this will happen again. (Richard)

The willingness to engage in help seeking with those who 'understand' the military experience, further enforces the importance of veteran offenders feeling a sense of connectivity and belonging that comes from engagement with support providers with similar backgrounds (Hundt *et al.*, 2015; Adams *et al.*, 2017). The findings suggest that the drive to belong that was present in the participants pre-enlistment life extended throughout their military careers and continues into their periods of incarceration:

> I'd definitely ask them if I needed help…It's kind of like you've got a different language to civilians so just the way you talk about things. (Matt)

Where family was cited as a positive contributor to desistance, sentiments of hope and gratitude were explored as a way to understand how these positive views towards family and support systems can contribute to desistance:

> I'd be totally fucked if it wasn't for my mum, dad and brother and girlfriend and stuff like that, so. And I'm one of the luckier ones, I've got people out there, there's folk in here who have fuck all. (Jeffrey)

> We're excited for a new start. So that's just like my life's on hold for two years and then pick it back up. (Matt)

Importantly, parenting was cited as a positive contributor to desistance as the participants' regaled feelings of hope to connect and re-engage with their children following their release. By viewing the transition out of incarceration and into fatherhood positively, the participants highlight how 'making up for lost time' serves as a motivator towards desistance:

> Spend as much time as I can with my son…basically get on a legit path and go there as well and never look back at crime and violence, and just basically make a good time of what I've got left of my life. (Richard)

> I'll put 110% in it and I can only try and the way I look at it, it's not only making my life but so I can support obviously my ex-girlfriend and my son and myself. (Max)

These findings align with research that suggests that the transition to fatherhood can support periods of 'aggressive offending desistance' as parenthood is viewed as an essential turning point in the life course by those with feelings of regret around their offending histories (Abell, 2018; Pyrooz, Mcgloin and Decker, 2017). The view of being able to 'make good' on their past histories allowed several of the participants the opportunity to redefine their potential futures and build a new identity outside of the 'failed' veteran and offender identity.

The research highlights a multitude of ways in which desistance can be supported for those with complex offending histories (Stone, 2016; Hazel, 2017; Salvatore and Taniguchi, 2012). However, desistance requires a level of consistency that is often difficult to achieve in under resourced institutions. Previous literature has found that veterans who return to low-income communities are more likely to experience mental health or substance abuse challenges, increasing their likelihood of becoming involved with the criminal justice system (May *et al.*, 2016). Without consistent mental health funding and support, community engagement opportunities, and the presence of positive social support, several of the participants appear to be at greater risk of engaging in periods of recidivism (See: Jardine, 2015; Visher, Winterfield and Coggeshall, 2006; Tovey, Winder and Blagden, 2022). In many ways, a return to their 'offender' identity may be through little fault of their own.

6.4.2 Challenging Inevitabilities

To highlight the multitude of risks and contributors to offending that were identified and explored by the participants would be an impossible task, as underneath every experience, lies a life history of unresolved battles that the participants have yet to fight. However, the impact of institutionalisation was illustrated by the majority of the participants at different stages in their life histories. Families, the military and the prison system were all seen to have institutionalised the participants in ways that would negatively influence their life trajectories. When discussing the participants' experiences of incarceration, many of the participants cited an indifference to the experience due to their experiences in the military and the difficulties they experienced in their pre-enlistment lives.

Max and Eric both illustrate how incarceration was not viewed as a deterrent to recidivism due to their feeling of being institutionalised during military service:

> I know, I seem very institutionalised. This [incarceration] is actually easier than basic training… I think this is just the army with less PT and less structure and shitter food. (Max)

> My heads all calmed down since I've been in a jail. And I think it's because it's like it feels familiar because of the army. I mean you've got a structure. (Eric

The structure provided throughout periods of incarceration mimics that of military life in such a way that several of the participants cited being able to function better in prison than in the community. Importantly, several of the participants discussed how the prison environment neglected their care needs in the same way the military and their families once did. Subsequently, the viewed incarceration as not positively contributing to their rehabilitation.

Jim and Nick illustrate how a lack of support that was targeted towards their specific needs around emotional regulation could hinder their ability to desist upon release:

> I told them I wanted counselling…I knew the person who was giving me anger management because I played football with her son. I don't think anger management helps anyone, to be honest. (Jim)

> So basically if you're in a pub in an argument, you're not going to sit in a chair and look at the wall and going to get laughed at. But that is what they teach you. (Nick)

Interestingly, for Jim, there appeared to be two barriers to engaging in this type of training and support noted. First, as Jim knew his anger management teacher, a

perceived form of public humiliation could have contributed to his disassociation with the support on offer. Consequently, limiting the opportunities to engage in any sort of discourse around the reasons for his difficulty with emotional regulation. Second, the lack of specified support Jim requested could have further embedded feelings of betrayal by yet another institution that was meant to facilitate a new life trajectory through incarcerations as a pathway to rehabilitation. Research has found that a reluctance to 'buy' into the desistance process has been found to correlate with negative help seeking experiences and a lack of individualised support prior to the re-integration process (McNeill, 2015; McNeill *et al.*,2012). The participants are showcasing the consequences of not having access to the specified type of support they view is essential to their desistance.

Additionally, a lack of future plans that include employment and forms of social connectivity was cited by several of the participants. Lewis and Sean illustrated how their plans for the future include isolating themselves as a means to stay out of trouble:

> When I got out I would sit on the dole and sit in the house for a while until I know that I'm not going to go out and get myself into trouble. (Lewis)

> All that, all that matters if I can go outside, sit in my wee dingy flat, no friends, but I can sit and have a smoke at the end of the night. (Sean)

Further, Will and Eric appeared to be at an increased risk of further offending upon their release due to the breakdown of family and social relationships while in prison:

> I've got no friends now….I've not got my mum or my dad…Because I was in the military and then jail. (Eric)

> When I first came into prison, I asked them not to come and see me because I was so ashamed and disgusted at what I'd done. (Will)

The overall sense of fear that was expressed by several of the participants highlights how isolating the term 'offender' can be, especially when the term 'sex offender' is applied. Keith and Jeffrey highlight how the judgement that has been assigned to their offences influenced their views on future interpersonal relationships:

> You've got to tell your next partner like I've been done with a rape...not likely (Keith)

> I would hate guys on this side …stay away from em… with a bird I'd be the same and stay away. (Jeffrey).

The findings suggest that the participants are therefore more likely to develop social relationships, foster previously held relationships and engage in social environments as

a means to engage in the desistance process (Jardine, 2015; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Additionally, the lack of social inclusion for a significant period (i.e. during life sentences) can lead to difficulties re-integrating back into the community as there are less opportunities to experience social interactions and step outside of ones' own internal narrative (De Claire and Dixon, 2017; Nilsson, 2011). For two of the participants, a life sentence could negatively influence their ability to re-integrate as a life sentence rarely means 'life'.

The deficit in these experiences is particularly impactful for many of the participants as limited social interactions appeared to compound their feelings of shame and hopelessness. Without the confidence and self-assurance that is elicited from social inclusion, the participants appeared to be at a higher risk of self-harm, social isolation, and subsequent recidivism (Nilsson, 2011; Brewster, McWade and Clark, 2021). Further, having an offender identity prevented several of the participants from addressing this stigma, thus making them more likely to isolate themselves in the future and potentially re-offend (Singleton, Meltzer, and Gatward, 1998; Stone, 2016).

Within the discourse around barriers to desistance, a lack of acceptance or expressed empathy towards the victims is noted as influential in understanding an individual's propensity to reoffend (Stone, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 2003). Here Jeffrey explored his view of his offending and his view of the importance of accepting his actions:

> You've got to get over it, it is what it is, you can't, you've done, you knew you were doing wrong. You got to accept that you've done all this. (Jeffrey)

However, it appears as though the form of acceptance conveyed by Jeffrey is more about acceptance as a means to move on, rather than to understand the reasons for his offending. Sean presents a similar lack of reflection here when discussion his apprehensions upon release:

> I'm worried about getting in a situation where I ever get done with another sex offence. That is my biggest fear. I'm worried about future relationships. (Sean)

Research has found that desistance, when treated as a developmental process that an individual must go through in order to prevent further offending, requires a cognitive transformation that acknowledges harm done to the victim, the community and to ones' self in order to be successful after periods of incarceration (Stone, 2016; Sampson and

Laub, 2003). However, for several of the participants, it appeared as though their priorities while incarcerated were not to understand their reasons for offending or the feelings that could put them at further risk to offend in the future.

For over half the participant population, the liklehood to reoffend was cited with a sense of impartiality, lacking in consequence:

> I'm not going to do sex offences, but I don't mind if I get down for drugs…Maybe misuse of drugs act or something…As long as it's nothing serious. (Sean)

The participants here display two conjoining and equally challenging narratives. First, the lack of acknowledgment around the seriousness of any type of offending highlights how detached the participants were from the victim/rehabilitation narrative that has been found to strengthen an individual's propensity to desist (Stone, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 2003). Second, the participants appeared as though the stigma that arose from being classed as a 'sex offender' was more impactful than the crime itself as illustrated by Jeffrey:

> I'd rather be in for a murder than this… numerous murders than this, honestly. This was the worst thing you could possibly do- I mean you're even stigmatised in jail, in prison and all places where everybody has done bad things, you're stigmatised for it. (Jeffrey)

> I couldn't care if I got done with murder. As long as I don't get done for another sex offence, I'll be a happy guy. (Eric)

Research has found that the way in which the participants discussed their offences could indicate their likelihood to re-offend. Where a lack of understanding about the cause of their offending is cited alongside a lack of acknowledgement around the impact of crime on victims and the wider community, the likelihood of recidivism is increased (Stone, 2016; Braithwaite, 1989). Sean further illustrated how a lack of insight into the severity of his offences, as well as a lack of empathy toward past or future victims, when discussing these offences can indicate an increased risk of recidivism:

> One sex offence you think the guys made a mistake. You get two and they think wait a minute, there's something wrong with this guy. (Sean)

In addition to a lack of empathy or acknowledgement around serious offences, a lack of acceptance of guilt could indicate whether an individual is more like to re-offend. As illustrated here, Chris and Max discuss their views of incarceration and their perceived innocence in relation to the seriousness of their offences:

> I'm fucking innocent here. I guaranteed I'll have cleared my name by the time- before my time is up. (Max)

> I'm not here for any judgement I swear like… I maintained my innocence on seven of them, three of them I fully admit I did commit these offences. (Chris)

As there are implications for release that correlate with their ability to showcase a form of rehabilitation through acknowledgement of guilt and remorse, several of the participants appeared to be expressing their experiences in this way in-authentically. The denial of their offences could have occurred as a means of self-protection, as a means to avoid the judgement referred to previously by several of the participants or as a means to genuinely declare their innocence. Additionally, the research indicates that this type of denial could have occurred as a means to protect what small aspects of their identity that remained after losing the many identities that were held prior to the development of their offender identity, including their military identity (See: Craissati, 2015; Hanson, Karl and Monique, 1998; Harkins, Beech and Goodwill, 2010). Ultimately, as the research has found, a life devoid of hope and acceptance remains a driver towards recidivism for many of the participants in this study as the cost of their offending was in many cases, everything (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016; Appleton, 2010; van Ginneken, 2015).

6.5 Get a Grip

The analysis found that a lack of acceptance or understanding about the participants challenging pre-enlistment experiences was a key hindrance to the participants seeking out help more actively while in the military. For several of the participants, the notion of shame combined with the narrative of being told to 'man up' provided too great of a barrier to overcome. Having faced transitioning back into civilian life through immediate discharge, the priory and through military correctional facilities, the participants shared insights into the ways in which the military can support future recruits and veterans. Through the use of the additional sub-themes *Make it easy* and *Know your audience*, this section explores those insights further.

6.5.1 Make it Easy

The majority of the participants recounted difficulty knowing when to operate as autonomous adults rather than following the line of command, which ultimately affected their willingness to access support in times of need. When approached with questions around supporting desistance in the military population, several of the

participants cited the need to be 'ordered' to access transitional support prior to leaving the military as a means of ensuring that even the most vulnerable would get support:

> You've got to tell us that we want it. (Max)

> The army changes you, and then if you have to see somebody then you have to see them [transitional support services] because you get in trouble for not going. (Stephen)

Stephen and Keith further illustrated how the military has the power to influence an individual's life course and therefore, the military has the power to ensure transitional support is provided adequately:

> Maybe make them go to some support like… make it as an order so that you carry it out…You don't get your pay until you done it. (Keith)

> Say you cannot leave until you've done this…because they took you out of school basically…you know, you need like work experience in civilian life. (Matt)

Although engagement in this manner may be perceived as forced, the participants have already cited various experiences of forced transitions through premature marriage and premature stages of adulthood. By ensuring the military is utilising the narrative of 'obey and abide by chain of command' during the transitional process, the military is potentially providing service leavers with the emotional rationale needed to engage in the necessary support when leaving the military (Milgram, 1963).

Further to this, several of the participants expressed views of the military betraying them through periods of exploitation during their youths and subsequent abandonment once they entered civilian life:

> I'm just so drilled every single day and that's why I'm saying they need to prepare you for coming out, civilian life isn't like life in the army. (Max)

> I feel like if they know that you're going to be leaving there should be some kind of build-up period …I had no idea, I was still a young guy, I'd only ever been at that school and in the army. (Lewis)

Several of the participants encouraged a more positive representation of help seeking as many were previously influenced by negative experiences of help seeking and therefore more vulnerable:

> Support me and give me advice rather than just leaving me to it…Tell me "Look, if you've got any problems, come speak to us''. (Richard)

> It's generally asking for help…say it's not a burden if you'll help us. (Stephen)

Importantly, several participants noted difficulties accessing help due to internal conflicts around masculinity and identity with regard to the language used with help seeking materials and resources:

> Being told 'Just man up, you have to man up.' So if you go and seek help, you thinking yourself… they're going to think that I'm not strong enough…So you want reassurance. (Eric)

> If it (support) was worded in a different way that didn't come across as a weakness… That would work. See if you just put "Phone this, asshole" and then just say, "You can get help for this." See that would work. (Max)

Research highlights cultural barriers and a wider propensity to avoid stigma and shame as hindrances to help seeking within military environments (Reit, 2017). Therefore, the masculine narrative that is perpetuated in many spheres of military culture should align differently with how the military approaches the provision of support. For the participants who engaged in help seeking, the responses previously cited were unsupportive and felt more punitive in nature.

Further, senior officers were cited as lacking 'empathetic views', which led to the participants feeling as though the military did not encourage or support help seeking. However, as research shows, the effects of reward and reinforcement addresses the importance of accountability and recognition of good work as a motivator to increase reward driven behaviours, such as help seeking (Rotter, 1966; Schwartz *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, a more positive narration of help seeking could increase the likelihood of an individual seeking help at the appropriate time.

While much of the sentiments around the participants disillusionment with military life may not be able to be attributed to the participants' propensity to offend, the overall sentiment towards the Army in particular was made clear here:

> What would I say at the army? Fucking get a grip of your soldiers. Make sure they're in line and get a grip of them. (Lewis)

Several of the participants felt that the transitional process should have been ingrained throughout their military careers as a means to prepare personnel better. As the return to civilian life has the potential to be experienced as both a 'positive' or 'negative' turning point, the process of mandatory re-integration training could enable the military to provide the essential life skills training lacking in many military personnel (Taylor *et al.*, 2020). In many ways, the participants expressed views that the military purposefully takes you out of difficult home lives and returns you back to civilian life without the

preparation needed to be successful, which in turn further impacts an already untenable life trajectory.

6.5.2 Know Your Audience

Several participants described feeling as though the military did not take into consideration the challenges of transitioning back into civilian life for those who had joined at a young age or enlisted as a means to flee a disadvantaged background. Illustrated by Lewis, the military is aware that it is recruiting from vulnerable populations and providing inadequate support to them:

> If they didn't want more to recruit people like me then, they would go to posh areas. (Lewis)

Ultimately, more than half of the participants directly cited feeling that if the military is to continue to recruit from disadvantaged backgrounds, it must address the challenging experiences and psychosocial needs of new recruits. As not all of those who experience military service have the necessary skills required to be 'successful' in military life (Grimell, 2018; Downey and Crummy, 2022).

Further, several participants cited the need for the military to acknowledge where a lack of pre-enlistment experiences and the lack of transition planning could negatively influence the military to civilian transition:

> You need to have a long term plan…especially if you're at a young age because you don't know the meanings of saving when you're young obviously. (Matt)

> Not wait until the last minute for like housing options and stuff because the amount of guys that I know that came out and have been homeless, it's ridiculous. (Max)

> They should be like tell you like they can help you with housing or help you with getting like forms (Stephen)

Where participants cited the ramifications of joining the military at a young age, many discussed how they were ill prepared for the civilian transition as the military was all they knew or were aiming for in their youth:

> For a boy who's 16 to 18, I think the army should do a lot more for people who are leaving during training because they've got their hopes up in doing this job and the way I was out wasn't ok and I've had my last wage they just say that 'Hey, well, that's you. (Jim)

For several of the participants, the feeling of being forced into adulthood was as a means to assimilate into military culture. Nick illustrates the consequences of such forced transitions and how this experience influenced their views of military culture:

> I just feel like I don't think there was anybody to educate me on life experience because I've kind of like done the forces …They don't teach you how to raise a kid in the forces…but they tell you to have em. (Nick)

Although the military does not 'force' anyone into having children, the desire to be part of military culture and the need for housing opportunities means that often military personnel feel as though they need to present as part of a 'happy family' in order to assimilate into military life. Consequently, when the participants were unsuccessful in their assimilation into military life, this was perceived by the participants as a consequence of poor military support, exploitation and neglectful oversite.

A lack of positive experiences communicating the need to engage in help seeking in both social circles and from senior officers was cited by several of the participants as contributory to their difficulties. Therefore, as a means to support new recruits in accessing support without feelings of shame or embarrassment, the participants recommended the military train recruits around the benefits of help seeking from the stage of enlistment:

> Maybe one thing that they should be teaching the boys when they're joining up, if you ever need help, this is the process that you follow, there's no shame for it. …That would probably I think help the guys. (Eric)

> Tell me I'm a man if I get help because now you're taught that you are less of a man if you get it (Jeffrey)

Further, Lewis illustrates how shame, fear and embarrassment can impact the transitional process and therefore, individual support was advocated for:

> I think it's more about preparing them for getting out and a one to one is better than a group sessions… it's very difficult in a group session, especially if you're struggling with stuff in front of people that are your peers. (Lewis)

Importantly, the lack of mental health support, along with a deficit in targeted support for veterans was explored as a means to understand how instances of trauma relating to military service rarely end after discharge:

> We just need something straightforward that can actually help, because two of the guys I was in the army with committed suicide within two years of leaving the army, one of them committed suicide in a year in to the army, and two more tried to commit suicide whilst they were in the army. (Matt)

> Put it this way, you get guys who get out and they're that depressed and not living their life end up on drugs and everything is like…they will come and just take their lives. They definitely need after care. (Nick)

Throughout several of the participants' narratives, recommendations for veterans appeared to be less of a recommendation for others and more of a wish for themselves:

> If they know something is happening with somebody like pulling you aside and saying why is this all happening. (Stephen)

For those who experienced 'support' in the form of incarceration within a military correction facility, the feeling of abandonment was once again echoed as though in every circumstance and within every institution, the participants were left to completely support themselves with little life experiences and a multitude of compounded traumas:

> And the one thing about is that after the army jail, it's like there was no contact at all…I was on my own again. (Nick)

> I think the army should have a person, a probation officer or whatever to go into prison …If that was chance, some people can maybe go back. (Lewis)

The lack of support offered to the participants further embedded a self-held narrative of unworthiness, betrayal and disillusionment that has been repeatedly experienced throughout their lives. As such, the recommendations could be viewed as a way to 'get back at the military', to help future veterans or as way to communicate the support they wish they had.

Ultimately, the salient insights shared by the participants shed light on the ways in which the military can best support veterans with difficult life histories. Importantly, the recommendations also bring to light the often overshadowed feelings of regret held by the participants about 'what went wrong'. The participants shared an overarching sentiment of loss, further underpinned by the notion that they never deserved support in their early life stages and therefore, why should they deserve it now. For many, the impact of neglect, loss and disenfranchisement from the military echoes throughout the narrations of their lives as illustrated by Nick in our final moments together:

> I hope I've not bothered you too much with my life. (Nick)

6.6 Conclusion

Over the last three chapters, many of the participants have illustrated how the combination of unresolved childhood traumas and the demand of military service were too difficult to navigate due to a lack of psychological resilience, an inappropriate level of mental health support and consistently narrated dysfunctional views of violence. Lastly, feelings of betrayal by the military and a loss of military identity were viewed as

contributory to several of the participants' life trajectories and offending histories. Recommendations for the military include changing the recruitment demographic, increasing mental health support and ensuring transitional support is available to all veterans, regardless of how they were discharged.

The following infographic (See: Figure Twenty) provides a condensed overview of the thirteen participants who shared common narratives as a means to provide a brief overview of how the majority of participants' experiences intertwined.
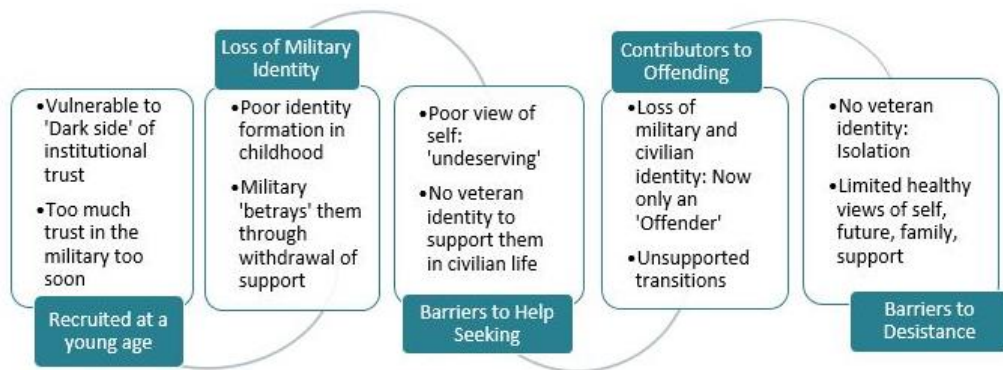
Figure 20: Majority Participant Overview Infographic

The following infographic (See: Figure Twenty-One) provides a condensed overview of the remaining two participants who shared narratives that are not too dissimilar from the majority of participants and yet dissimilar enough that they would be considered outliers amongst the participant population.

Figure 21: Minority Participant Overview Infographic

Lastly, as a means to provide a level of continuity, the final infographic (See Figure Twenty-Two) provides a condensed view of the recommendations that the participants made when asked how the MoD could better support both active armed forces personnel and veterans.
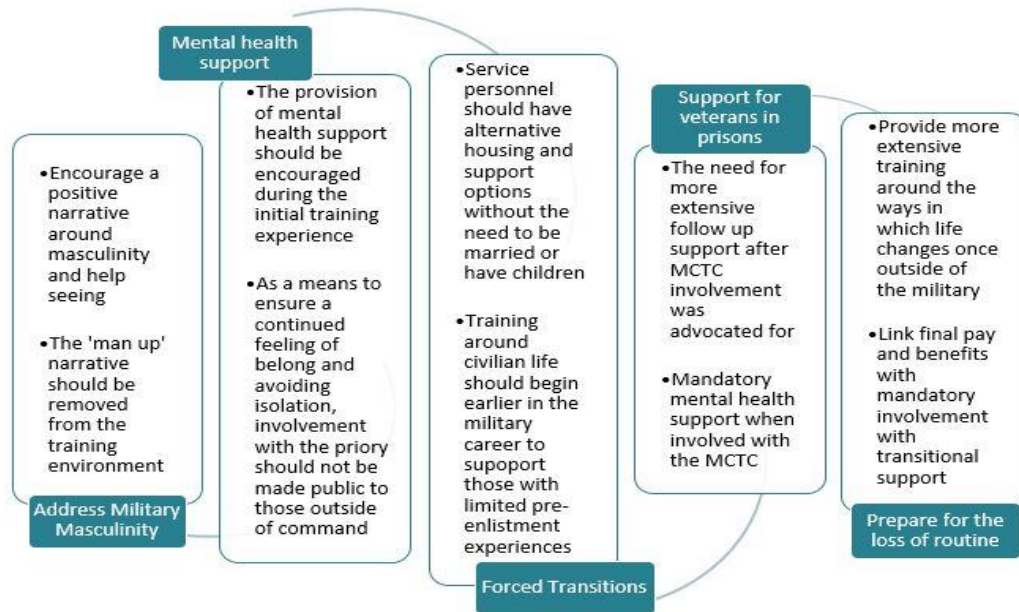
Figure 22: Infographic exploring the participants recommendations for the MoD

Chapter Seven: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

Throughout this chapter, an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the findings has been taken in order to comprehend the many areas of knowledge, practices and assumptions that inform what is known about the needs of incarcerated veterans. With the aforementioned research questions guiding the following discussion chapter, the findings of the research will be explored alongside the current literature around the challenges that incarcerated veterans face. As such, the chapter will begin by looking at the novel findings that were uncovered throughout the study around vulnerabilities to military service, breaches of trust, unconscious transitions and losing the veteran identity. Following this, the chapter will explore the recommended theoretical and policy considerations that have been made as a result of the findings. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the practical and reflective limitations of the study.

7.2 Developing and Conflicting Identities

The findings have revealed that the negative views of the self conveyed by the majority of the participants developed from adverse childhood experiences and periods of trauma, which were often left unexplored and unresolved. It was during the most formative years of the participants' lives where experiences of dysfunctional family relationships, limited access to support resulted, and in some cases neglect and abuse, resulted in feelings of worthlessness and insecurity. Research which explores the relationship between negative views of the self and adversity in childhood highlights how influential these experiences can be for identity formation. While not all young people who have experienced periods of adversity will report having low self-esteem, those who have experienced adversity are at risk of social isolation, risk taking behaviours and views of 'deserving' their early childhood experiences. Consequentially, the opportunities to develop strong social bonds, challenge negative internal narrations and develop a social identity outside of their difficult circumstances becomes even more limited (See: Schneiders *et al.*, 2003; Spijkers, Jansen and Reijneveld, 2012; Elliott, Chargualaf and Patterson, 2016). Further, the findings have uncovered being seen as a caregiver prior to adulthood significantly hindered the participants' opportunities to 'experience' childhood.

When reflecting on their family lives, several of the participants cited experiences of 'parentification', through periods of financial exploitation, informal caring responsibilities and the provision of childcare to young children. Consequently, participants reported a lack of secure relationships with or support from male and female role models in their early lives, which continued throughout the participants' adolescences and emerging adulthood stages (Hurd, Zimmerman and Xue, 2009).

Within this context, participants also noted difficult experiences beyond the family, such as in the context of education. The findings of the study align with the research that suggests that the combination of difficult family relationships and negative views of the self can lead to isolation and difficult adaptation in educational and training environments (See: Verhoeven, Poorthuis and Volman, 2018; Gillies, 2003). Consequently, where the participants were more vulnerable to the development of negative views of the self, they were also more vulnerable to periods of social exclusion, educational exclusion and periods of anti-social behaviour (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008; Sokol, 2009). Joining the military was often cited as a means to escape these external and internal consequences of poor family relationships and lack of support in childhood.

Importantly, there was an internal confliction that appeared within several of the interviews, which highlighted the complicated way in which the participants understood their lived experiences and their motivations for joining the military, which often occurred at a young age. First, several accounts suggested that participants joined the military as a way of affirming an identity instilled on them by their families, and as a means to strengthen their internal drive to be seen as 'independent', 'a man', or 'successful. Second, the participants seemed to join as a means to escape contexts of limited employment and education, and in direct defiance of the limitations placed on them by their geography, their childhood experiences and their families. However, throughout the data analysis process, the participants' vulnerability to periods of isolation and a desire to belong became apparent as coinciding motivations to join.

For the participants who cited joining the military as a means to 'be a man' or to be independent, conflicting accounts of their readiness for military service also emerged. For the participants who joined the military prior to the age of eighteen, these findings align with existing research, which suggests that young individuals are more vulnerable to developing expectations of belonging imposed upon them by their social

and educational environments (See: Salvatore and Taniguchi, 2012; Schwartz *et al.,* 2011). As such, where the participants had negative experiences of belonging and poor experiences of social inclusion in their pre-enlistment lives, they may have been more vulnerable to having unrealistic expectations of 'fitting in' within military culture.

Roccas and Brewer (2002) explore *Social Identity Complexity* as a potential way of understanding how an individual copes when they experience several identities overlapping, alongside multiple groups converging, requiring an individual to hold numerous identities at the same time. The findings suggest that this was a phenomenon that several of the participants were experiencing while going through the enlistment and training process. Consequently, several of the participants were holding multiple competing identities during their developmental periods (i.e. carer, young person, friend, brother, soldier), which led to difficulties at home and within their social groups. As young people without much support, often the participants were left to balance the expectations of their families and friends while also trying to develop their individual identity. Further, the enlistment process was not an easy journey for some and there were expectations placed upon them while trying to enlist. For three of the participants who were involved in the cadet forces prior to joining, there was an additional pressure placed on them due to having to commute to other towns, engage with the social groups in that area and often avoid instances of youth violence.

Subsequently, there were many instances where the participants had to develop a hierarchy amongst their numerous social groups (Roccas and Brewer, 2002). As a result, several of the participants cited feeling as though they were being 'pulled' in different directions, trying to please every social environment they were a part of. Previously, the notion of social capital was explored as a way to understand some of the participants' motivation to join the military from a young age. Given the social capital and the perceived power provided by the military, several of the participants chose to cut ties with friends and family members as a means to lessen the burden that came from numerous social groups (Goffman, 1957). However, the decision to choose the military was often rejected by the participants' social environment, furthering having them to choose the military over their pre-enlistment lives over and over again.

While the research agrees that the process of switching between two differing identities can occur, there are challenges to engaging in *Alternating Biculturalism.* Explored by LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, (1993), *Alternating Biculturalism*

explores the notion that individuals can gain an awareness of their need to switch between identities and cultures in order to maintain safety in several competing worlds (See: Parson, 2015; Roccas and Brewer, 2002; LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1993). This process first requires a recognition that multiple identities need to coexist as a way of self protecting and as a means to belong. Second, the process requires an acceptance of the new identities and new cultures. Third, the process requires a conscious 'rating' of each individual culture and identity in order to meet the individuals perceived objectives (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1993). This process in itself requires a constant form of reflexivity in order to retain psychological resilience against the constant shifts an individual would be experiencing during this time. For the participants in this study, there was an apparent lack of understanding that joining the military would require a constant switching between the culture and identity they maintained in their home lives and the culture and identity they were enlisting into.

Regardless of which individual identity is determined to be dominate, the 'common identity' of the collective must be seen to remain at the top of the hierarchy (Tajfel, 1978; Brewer and Gardner, 1996). However, for Nick and James, the military gaining a hierarchical position within their social groups lead to cited interpersonal difficulties reconciling the need to move beyond their pre-enlistment identity and put the military first. For those who join as a means to escape challenging backgrounds, the need to protect their primary identity may be essential to their ability to re-integrate back into their community or to maintain personal safety. The individual will understand the needs for their identity to go through a process of transformation and their individuality will be redefined in order to become part of the military subculture (Goffman, 1957; Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014). However, when group identities merge, there are implications for how an individual defines their social self, especially when training coincides with adolescent development stages that support the establishment of identity and autonomy (Park, 2011; Roccas and Brewer, 2002). When Social Identity Complexity theory applies to large collective groups such as the military, an individual may be more likely to experience difficulties balancing the needs of the collective alongside the needs of the self (Roccas and Brewer, 2002).

For the participants, the strong desire to belong amongst each of their cultures and social groups was further influenced by the low self-worth many of them had developed in their early childhoods (Erikson, 1968). Therefore, they fought extremely

hard to maintain every opportunity that would foster their desire to belong, regardless of the negative impact on their psychological wellbeing. Further, the findings align with the research that suggests that where a lack of positive experiences bonding and belonging, difficulty adjusting to new environments may occur (See: Forces in Mind Trust, 2022; Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008; Sokol, 2009). Consequently, when the participants were not 'fitting in' in their social groups at home and were not experiencing feelings of belonging in the military, they were more likely to experience periods of social isolation they had not anticipated upon joining the military.

Further, for the participants who cited joining as a means to escape difficult home lives, relationships they deemed *'cancerous'[33]* contributed to periods of isolation they felt could be alleviated by military service. As the military historically and presently advertises the military as an environment where social cohesion and periods of belonging are fostered, for many of the participants the transition into military service was viewed positively (Flack and Kite, 2021). However, the military does not often advertise how periods of comradery must be built upon, that isolation in military service can occur and just as the family left behind can be dysfunctional, the military too has its own dysfunctions. For many of the participants, a perfect storm was created between their negative view of self, a lack of feeling of belonging anywhere in their social worlds and their unmet expectations of military service. Consequently, this perfect storm followed many of the participants throughout their lives contributing to several unanticipated transitions in and out of various institutions (i.e. their families, the military, and prison), without a conscious appreciation for the impact these transitions would have on their life trajectory.

7.3   Blockades to Help Seeking

Early experiences entrenched anti-help seeking attitudes which were further exacerbated during military service. Negative experiences of training were cited as overtly masculine, unsupportive and dangerous, which combined with previous instances of trauma, decreased many of the participants' ability to be successful in training environments. Much of the research that addresses the barriers to help seeking

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[33] In Findings One, Section 4.3.2, you will note that Max in particular noted his relationships with family as 'cancerous'. Similar narratives were echoed by the participants throughout, therefore,

does not address the relationships that exist between overtly masculine identities and delayed help seeking (Hellström and Beckman, 2021). Tools such as the Male Role Attitudes Scale (MRAS) (Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku, 1993), The Adolescent Masculinity in Relationships Scale (AMRIS) (Chu et al., 2005), and the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS) (Thompson Jr. and Pleck, 1986) have been used to identify descriptive phrases that align with stereotypes about how men 'should' behave in order to uncover common view points about how different genders view and interact with various social processes (Levant et al., 2007). Throughout the interviews, the participants utilised language that is identified in the literature as aligning with the hegemonic masculinity framework (i.e. strong, powerful, provider, protector, hard, manly, a real man, unemotional) (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Their cited motivators to join related to a desire to 'be a man', through the portrayal of these traits in the context of military service. The military therefore was a place for them to 'do' masculinity.

Importantly, masculinity is understood to account for both individual gendered action and larger gender structures (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The individual perceptions of masculinity that were developed in the participants' formative years ultimately influenced how they experienced periods of 'hyper masculine' training exercises. Consequently, many several of the participants appeared to lack the insight into how the military environment would be potentially upsetting or triggering given their histories of violence in childhood. As such, many of the participants cited a lack of resilience to the demands of the overtly masculine format of enlistment training in particular. When difficulties arose, the participants appeared to be unable to adapt to the expectations placed on them, which further embedded fears of failure or disconnectedness from the collective (Flack and Kite, 2021; Swann Jr et al., 2009; MacCoun, 1996). The findings suggest that it was the compounded nature of having an internal driver to belong and an external driver of overtly masculine training that discouraged many of the participants to actively engage in help seeking when they needed it (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Engebretson, 2007; Salvatore and Taniguchi, 2021).

Further, several participants emphasised an inability to engage in their social worlds and emotionally regulate as being a direct consequence of experiencing negative presentations of masculinity by role models in childhood and early adolescence (Berke et al., 2019; Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku, 1993; Richmond and Levant, 2003). When new,

military role models that were presented to them (i.e. CO's, those in positions of power), these were again experienced as abusive and negligent, creating feelings of disillusionment with military service and a lack of willingness to seek support in challenging times.

Within this masculine culture of the military, the study found that participants' desire to maintain their own masculine identities served as a barrier to help seeking, both during military service and in their transitions to the civilian context (Bird, 1996; McKenzie et al., 2018; Cleary, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 1995). Existing research highlights that there are fewer opportunities to engage in discussions about support needs if there are strong masculine identities amongst a veteran group (McKenzie et al., 2018; Wade et al., 2015; Wendt and Shafer, 2016). For the participants in this study, the group dynamics they found themselves in appeared to be so influential to their self-perception that they chose to remain predominately silent so that they were seen as 'worthy', rather than risk seeking support or being seen as 'other' (Wadham and Morris 2019). During this time, the relationships held by the participants, at their core, lacked a sense of intimacy that many of the participants were seeking out. Consequently, the priority was to maintain an appearance of strength and dependency, rather than to seek out or even provide social support and protection (Bird, 1990; Cleary, 2005).

As such, many of the participants greatly needed a support system during these challenging periods, however, given their family histories, many of them experienced these challenges in isolation. The findings align with similar research that identified a relationship between poor resilience to trauma, impulsivity and deviant behaviours with individuals who have experienced compounded periods of adversity in childhood (See: Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Pratt and Cullen, 2000; Vazsonyi, Mikuška, and Kelley, 2017). As the majority of participants cited numerous periods of compounded trauma and adversity, it appeared as though their propensity to 'act out' or have a low resilience to negative experiences of help seeking were to be expected. Further, due to the social capital that they assigned to their military careers running in parallel to their own challenged identities, the act of asking for help from those outside of the military seemed unfathomable. As such, the findings align with the research that suggest that social and psychosocial stigma associated with help seeking discouraged the participants from engaging in help seeking as community members, families and

friendships appeared to influence the participants willingness to appear vulnerable or in need of assistance (Mojtabai, Olfson and Mechanic; Sareen et al., 2005). In addition to this, the findings align with the research that suggests that poor experiences of support or help seeking can compound internal barriers around help seeking that form as a blockade to future acts of help seeking, as negative connotations are consistently attached to the act. Therefore, lessening the potential for many of the participants to engage in future acts of help seeking as they have associated asking for help with being let down or dismissed (Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen, 2010; Velasco et al., 2020).

Finally, the research has shown that masculine and 'pro-male' characteristics act as mediators in a willingness to seek help. However, there is a gap in the literature that explores how these traits may affect tangible acts of help seeking, such as refusing to take a pamphlet or looking at a flyer on an information board (Wade et al., 2015). Therefore, the perceived 'femininity' of help seeking language has been explored as a barrier to care when considering the masculine prototype that is represented by military culture (Wade et al., 2015; Wendt and Shafer, 2016). Further, many of the participants may have been more vulnerable to feminising insults and triggers due to dysfunctional viewpoints that were unknowingly related back to negative experiences with several of the participants' mothers and therefore (Kovach, 2015; Henry, 2017). Explored throughout the study, the perfect storm of poor literacy, hyper masculine role models and feelings of unworthiness created once more an almost impossible battle for the participants to resolve on their own.

7.4 Unworthy of Help

The participants in this study were particularly vulnerable to poor mental health, negative views of the self and periods of self harm due to compounded instances of adversity and trauma in their early lives (See: Schneiders *et al.*, 2003; Spijkers, Jansen and Reijneveld, 2012; Elliott, Chargualaf and Patterson, 2016). Existing research posits that individual characteristics including age, gender, previous experiences of trauma, current life stressors and social support have been found to impact the levels of resilience to to such experiences (Straussner and Calnan, 2014; Brewin, Andrews and Valentine, 2000; Stamm and Friedman, 2000). Therefore, in the context of military service, it can be difficult to predict which recruits may be more vulnerable to difficult military experiences.

Within this challenging context, the findings of this research study have identified that the adverse childhood experiences reported by participants appeared to inhibit help-seeking behaviours when required across the life course. While a lack of help seeking is documented for veterans, with existing research linking this to military culture and masculinities (Reit, 2017), the findings presented within this study offers new insight into how often these attitudes can form before military service. Further, while dysfunctional masculine views of help seeking were reported with a high frequency, so were feelings of unworthiness and undeserving of help due to periods of neglect and abuse experienced by their families and care givers.

When insights about the participants' experiences of childhood sexual and physical abuse were explored, these experiences were reportedly viewed as 'normal' and 'unworthy' of interjection by those in positions of power. The participants therefore highlight how periods of neglect and abuse during their early development can negatively influence an individual's view of 'deserving' help (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead; 2008). The findings align with research that suggest that individuals may be less likely to report instances of sexual or physical abuse when experienced for a prolonged period of time (see: Dierkhising *et al.*, 2013; Adelman and Taylor, 2021b), and apply this to the veteran context.

Exploring the importance of maternal figures, the participants who reported negative relationships with their mothers or other female caregivers cited negative views of help seeking with a higher prevalence and a higher rate of sexual offending. While unable to explore the notion of maternal abuse relating to periods of sexual offending, it appeared that the dysfunctional view of violence formed in the participants lives, along with their negative experiences of help seeking and the breaches of trust experienced by the maternal relationships could have contributed to an emotional numbing in several of the participants. In turn, several of the participants who reported a history of sexual violence, also cited a lack of help seeking as a means to understand the relationship between their lived experiences and their offending histories:

> I've not had time to deal with any of what happened when I was a kid. Because I was constantly dotting about because of my mum. So mentally, that has took its strain on me. I'm about fucked in the head. (Keith)

Without positive experiences of help seeking, many of the participants were left without the experiences needed to learn how to communicate effectively, engage in help

seeking or engage in trust building exercises with new individuals in positions of power as a means to transition into new environments (i.e. new senior officers). Subsequently, the findings align with the research that suggests that instances of broken trust in particular can contribute to feelings of hopeless around the help seeking process (See: Howard and Gamble, 2011; O'Neill, Kuhlmeier and Craig, 2018). Further to this, the lack of positive experiences expressing their needs and seeing their needs met, appeared to contribute to an 'emotional numbing' that potentially furthered the participants willingness to engage in serious and sexual offending (Evans *et al.*, 2003; Galovski and Lyons, 2004). The findings suggest that had the participants experienced fewer breaches of trust by those in positions of power throughout their early life stages, they may have sought help and ultimately moved away from the path towards offending.

7.5 Accelerated Transitions are Forced Transitions

Throughout this research study, the notions of *transitions* and *turning points* have been explored as a means to understand the impact of both individual experiences and institutional influences across the life course. Many of participants viewed the notion of *transitions* as simply 'unseen' experiences that 'happened' to them, with *turning points* being unheard of prior to the interview. For the participants who joined the military from a young age, there was no demarcation between when their childhood ended and when their adulthood began due to the way in which the military operates. Consequently, many of the participants had little sense of the fact that two simultaneous transitions (i.e. adolescence to emerging adulthood, civilian life to military life) were occurring and that the impact of losing this transitional period to military service would influence their entire life course (Schlossberg, 1981; Wang *et al.*, 2007; Gulliver *et al.*, 2010).

Had the participants viewed joining and leaving the military as *turning points* in their lives, the narration of their lived experiences may had been different as they would have been consciously 'choosing' military life rather than apparently running towards any environment that was perceived to be able to 'save' them. Research explores *turning points* as experiences that are more evident to the individual and therefore have a stronger influence over an individual's life trajectory (See: Blokland and Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Sampson and Laub, 2003). These experiences can be differentiated by how an individual views the experience, the wider social impact of the experience and the stress or adaptations that arise from the event (Blokland and Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Sampson and

Laub, 2003). However, to view these experiences as positive or negative requires an awareness of the event being considered 'influential' in the first place. It appeared as though many of the participants were simply moving from one experience to another, often lacking any reflective insights into the implications, whether that be leaving school, joining the military or committing offences. The finding of this study therefore offers insight into the ways in which discounted and misunderstood transitions are influential in individuals' lives.

Often the research explores transitions as occurring in sequence or as a result of a key turning point (Godier *et al.*, 2017; Shepherd and Williams, 2020; Gordon, Burnell and Wilson, 2020). However, the transitions that occurred in the participants lives did not occur in the determinative way often described in the literature. For the participants in this study, the process of transitioning between adolescence, emerging adulthood, adulthood, military and civilian life were often chaotic. Their lives often being experienced as a yo-yo, being thrown between childhood, adulthood and every stage in between. The impact of being torn back and forth between various life stages, identities and responsibilities was often unrecognised by many of the participants, to such an extent that they cited a form of detachment from this period in their lives (Schlossberg, 1981). As such many of the participants appeared to be *performing* the transitions that influenced their life trajectories into the military, which impacted their actual readiness for military service (Goffman, 1957).

Further, throughout the findings, it became apparent that it was the accelerated transition from childhood and family life to matrimony and parenthood which was experienced with the greatest difficulty for the majority of the participants. Due to the accelerated nature of these transitions, many of the transitions appeared to have occurred too quickly to be recognised or adequately addressed for many of the participants. As a motivation to join was often cited as a means to flee dysfunctional home lives, several of the participants were more vulnerable to the processes demanded by the total institutionalisation required by military service (Goffman, 1957). As such, many of the participants experienced the military as wanting them to leave home, engage in training, shift their worldviews, develop new identities and for some, develop new families as a means to assimilate into military culture. Further, several of the participants cited viewing their transitions into adulthood as forced and exploitive in

nature due to the way in which the military has historically 'rewarded' traditional forms of family as highlighted once more here:

> They don't teach you how to raise a kid in the forces…but they tell you to have em-Nick

Further, exploring the military through the lens of the *greedy institution*, the military appeared to encourage many of the participants to build a support system not as a means to protect them but to carry the emotional labour of military service (Segal, 1986). Unfortunately, the difficult home lives in which the participants transitioned out of provided limited examples of stable and secure relationships that the participants could mirror while transitioning in and out of military life. For Matt, the transitions from being an emerging adult, to a husband, to a single young man all occurred before the age of twenty:

> We got told if we got married, we'd get a house…so that's how we've done it and it just crumbled almost instantly.-Matt

In the initial stages of the interviews, it appeared as though many of the participants viewed military service as a potential positive *turning point* (albeit not using this terminology), given many of them were fleeing difficult home lives and reported limited employment or training opportunities (Elder, Jr *et al.*, 2009; Sampson and Laub, 1996). However, as their narratives of their service experience progressed, for many of the participants, there was an acute awareness that they joined the military too young, married too young and saw combat too young, as explored in Findings Chapter Two. These findings align with the research that suggests that the positive views of military service can be outweighed by the negative effects of trauma, injury and war (Sampson and Laub, 1996; Wright *et al.*, 2019; Teachman and Tedrow, 2016; Wright *et al.*, 2019). Building on this existing research, this study has identified that many of the participants regretted joining the military at a young age and cited this as contributing to their trajectory towards offending. Further, many of the participants did not wait until after leaving the military to begin or restart their offending behaviours. As such, viewing the military to civilian transition as a potentially negative *turning point* does not apply. Therefore, the participants appeared to be more influenced by the negative experiences of training and the social isolation they experienced as contributing to their offending behaviours.

Additionally, many of the participants described negative and at times traumatic experiences in the military which led to a reorientation of their perception of the

organisation and their service (Sampson and Laub, 1993, Taylor *et al*., 2020). Participants described excessive periods of drinking, fighting and periods of bullying as contributing to feelings of isolation and anger towards the military. Consequently, when their behaviours contributed to a premature discharge, the military was once again at fault for leaving them with no option but to swiftly transition out of military life (Masten, 2013; Reuben *et al.,* 2016).

A unique contributing of this study is the finding that these experiences were not viewed through an interpersonal lens but through a narrative of how the military 'exploited' them. Much of the findings align with the research that advocates for transitions to be viewed within a hierarchical structure which takes into consideration the impact of the environment in which the transition occurs (See: Elder and Giele, 2009; Bernardi *et al*., 2019; Wadham and Morris 2019; Molendijk *et al*., 2015). Therefore, within the context of this study, it was not simply the participants' age and the often unconscious transitions that occur during that period that influenced their experiences in the military, but it was also the transition *into* the military environment that contributed to their life histories. Further, it was not the participants' families that were viewed through the lens of betrayal or neglect, but the military. As the military was viewed at the top of the participants' hierarchical pyramid during this time in their lives, the perceived betrayal they experienced was more influential towards their pathway to incarceration than anyone or anything else.

Therefore, the unconscious *transitions* and the negative *turning points* contributed to several of the participants experiencing yet another failed identity to contend with. The findings of this research study align with the research that suggests that experiencing several 'failed' identities simultaneously can damage an individual's core identity, influencing their ability to cope with life's changes and seek help (See: Main, 1996; For-Wey, Fei-Yin and Bih-Ching, 2002). However, for many of the participants, further challenges to their identities were difficult to content with due to the vulnerable identities held in their youths. Subsequently, many of the participants struggled to identify with any of the identities they were holding at the time.

Further, many of the participants, if not all, lacked a general awareness about how joining the military at a young age would define them at the time and further influence their futures:

> I just feel like I don't think there was anybody to educate me on life experience because I've kind of like done the forces, now what - Nick

As illustrated in the previous chapters, the findings of this research study align with previous research that suggests that acknowledging transitions as they are occurring is very difficult, if not improbable, especially for individuals with limited access to the psychological resilience needed during transitional periods (See: Settersten, Furstenberg and Rumbaut, 2005; Wheaton, 1990; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008). Importantly, many of these shifts and losses were being experienced too quickly to be acknowledged and therefore went unresolved. Aligning with the research by Brewer and Herron (2022), the findings suggest that for many of the participants, the various forced transitions (i.e. from adolescent, to recruit, to adult, to husband, to father), contributed to further unconscious transitions in their identities that they were psychologically or developmentally prepared for.

Importantly, while all of these transitions and shifts were occurring, the participants were experiencing the institutionalised process of militarisation at the same time (Goffman, 1957). For many of the participants, their view of military service informed their identity to such an extent that their military identity was formed well before their time in service began. As such, when they started experiencing transitional difficulties, their military careers and identities were also consciously and unconsciously at risk. Consequently, many of the participants were once more stuck in a perfect storm between compounded 'failed' identities, loss of their support systems and a loss of the support they expected of the military.

7.6 Institutional Betrayal

For the participants of this study, the age in which they enlistment appeared to be significantly influential in how the transitioned into the institution that is the military. For the two participants who joined after the age of eighteen, their experiences were narrated with more positive experiences and a greater sense of their feeling as though their reasons for incarceration were linked to their own behaviours. However, for the participants who joined before the age of eighteen, there was a consistent narrative that viewed the military as exploitive and contributory to their offending histories.

For those unfamiliar with military culture, the process of undergoing routines of self-mortification, the loss of personal freedoms and the replacement of their own value set can be experienced with difficulty (Goffman, 1957). Within the framework of the

'total institution', the trust given by the recruit is essential to engage in the social systems occupied by the military (Goffman, 1957). An individual is asked to trust, not just another person, but an entire new culture and way of life (Goffman, 1957). The primary purpose of the training process is to build on that trust with the aim of controlling and dictating an array of the recruits' life until they are socialized to military culture (Goffman, 1957). The enlistment process demands almost a total re-socialisation, requiring the recruit to re-learn social cues and expectations. These experiences extend beyond the typical demands made by other organisations offering similar career opportunities (Goffman, 1957; Albertson, 2019).

Importantly in the context of this research study, these transitional experiences can be made worse by the reliance on humiliation by senior officers to break an individual's self-esteem and lower their internal resilience as a form of introduction to military life. Historically, these acts of 'bonding' are described as essential to building the foundations needed to build a cohesive unit. This form of bonding is treated as the only ways in which obedience, tribalism or 'intragroup trust' can be achieved (Martin and Hummer, 1989). However, the majority of the participants viewed these experiences as key motivators to their offending as some of them returned to their unstable pre-enlistment lives to seek a sense of belonging, some engaged in alcohol misuse contributing to their offences and some engaged in acts of violence as a means to retaliate against those who were perceived to be abusing them. During these periods of 'socialisation', several of the participants cited being unable to risk their positions amongst their cohort by asking for the abuse to stop or by asking for help. Subsequently, the findings align with the research the suggests that an unwillingness to appear as weak or unable to cope with uncertainty is a large contributor to when an individual is willing to start the help seeking process, with many waiting until tipping point to engage (Mellotte *et al.*, 2017; Sharpe, 2015).

Previously, hyper masculine viewpoints towards help seeking were explored as being a barrier to help seeking. However, within the context of the findings, it appeared that is was not just the loss of being seen as a 'man' that hindered the participants willingness to engage in help seeking but also a fear of excommunication from their chosen institution should they express needing help. As such, several of the participants felt that their station within the group orientation would be compromised and therefore, they would not be elevated within the institution and would ultimately return to pre-

enlistment periods of loneliness and isolation (Wadham and Morris 2019). It was at this stage where many of the participants chose to either isolate themselves or force themselves to align with their group (Wadham and Morris 2019). Research has found that when the group dynamics begin to break down, the trust instilled by the recruit to the institution becomes contingent on the individual in command. As highlighted by the participants, their command did not always abide by their individual's needs, as they were viewed to be in direct conflict with the institutions agenda (Wadham and Morris 2019). Ultimately leaving many of the participants at risk. Consequently, many of the participants felt they must abide by the institutions needs or risk being rejected and potentially, thrust back into civilian life. As highlighted by Jeffery, there is no better way to illustrate how influential masculinity and fear was to the help seeking process for several of these participants:

> I think the way we are taught, it's not like they say don't ask for help, it's just kind of that's implied…you're not going to really ask for help if you're a man.- Jeffrey

In more than half of the participant interviews, the participants appeared to be mitigating three very different identities, that of an emerging adult needing help, that of a soldier needing self-reliance, and that of an offender not deserving help (Engebretson, 2007; Greene *et al.*, 2010). Notably, the absence of support received during periods of vulnerability further embedded feelings of apprehension and frustration towards the military, as the military was often referred to as something that was 'supposed' to help them (Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen, 2010; Adams *et al.*, 2017).

A novel finding of this research study highlights how the participants viewed the military institutional betrayal as once again, more influential than the perceived betrayal they were experiencing within the prison institution at the time of interview. Several of the participants cited difficulty in prison, a lack of mental health treatment and an overall feeling of hopelessness around the lack of skills or educational opportunities that were available to them while incarcerated. Yet, they narrated feelings of the military betraying them once more. Further, as many of the participants cited engagement with the criminal justice system prior to military service as well as a lack of provision of support by police, teachers and counsellors, it could have been assumed that the participants would view the institutional betrayals that occurred within their families and within the criminal justice system as equally influential to their pathway to

offending. However, the military was viewed to have failed the participants with higher frequency than any other institution they had belonged in up until the point of interview.

7.7   Lost Identities

The finding of this research highlight how influential losing several identities at once was for the participants. In many narrations, the participants explored how losing their childhood identities, their social group identities and their military identities all within a short period contributed to their overall feelings of isolation which acted as a barrier to help seeking for them. Therefore, the findings suggest that it was the loss of their military identity did not revolve around their failed training experiences, rather included all of the 'failings' they had experienced up until that point.

Exploring the findings through the *Dynamic Systems Theory*, the notion that identity development can take place across numerous periods of time in a person's life and the process of development is not determined by a particular life stage was highlighted as relevant (Lichtwarck-Aschoff *et al*., 2008). For the participants, their identities were influenced by both their developmental stages and the environment in which they experienced impactful transitions (i.e. new careers, new homes, and new families). When considering how the participants viewed their veteran identity, it was apparent that their identities with regard to the military were developed prior to enlistment, as well as during military service and after. If you are to consider how long an individual may contemplate joining the military prior to enlistment, their family history or their socialisation, an individual could be formulating their veteran identity long before they became one. Therefore, their time in service becomes less relevant to their veteran identity (Grimell, 2018b; Flack and Kite, 2021). This was particularly true for this participant population as the loss they experienced when they left the military was far more influential than any loss they had experienced previously.

While the development of any identity is often an unconscious experience, losing that identity could be experienced with more difficulty should the transition out of the military be conducted without preparation. Where the participants cited leaving the military prematurely, many of them were still in their early developmental stages of adolescence with limited life experiences to inform their civilian lives (i.e. housing, finances, and child care). Subsequently, the participants appeared to have little resilience to cope with the immediate challenges (i.e. identity shifts, housing expectations, civilian employment) that would come with an early discharge (Salvatore

and Taniguchi, 2021; Tavernier and Willoughby, 2012). Furthermore, the removal of their military identity appeared to impact the participants' already existent failed identities that related to their prior academic and employment experiences. As such, the swift removal from military life left them with the realisation that there was 'nowhere' for them to go as educational opportunities were limited and a return to home life would mean a return to a life they fought so hard to flee.

For almost all of the participant population, the sudden loss of identity, employment and housing appeared to leave the participants isolated, feeling as though they were societally outcast and viewed as failures amongst their families and social circles. Left unresolved, the lack of positive relationships in the participants formative years led to poor mental health, offending, and social isolation during and post military service (Woodward and Frank, 1988; Puskar *et al.*, 2008; Chowdry, Crawford and Goodman, 2011). Subsequently compounding the participants' low view of the self, willingness to seek help and the ability to form new lives as civilians.

Consequently, the sudden loss of their military identity and the ambitions held by the participants around developing a new identity (i.e. to be a hero, a real man, a soldier) appeared to have further compounded an internalised rationale of unworthiness stemming from years of abandonment, abuse, breaches of trust and loss (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008; Sokol, 2009). Given the difficult pre-enlistment experiences of the participants (i.e. low literacy, abuse, maltreatment, socio economic deprivation), the lack of help seeking in regard to the participants mental health contributed to a critical internal conflict that appeared present in several of the participants interviews. Subsequently, the inability to assimilate to military culture appeared to be experienced as a failure which was self –imposed, just as the periods of neglect in childhood were experienced as self-inflicted or deserved (Grimell, 2018; Downey and Crummy, 2022).

Importantly, a form of social solidarity was cited by the participants when instances of offending were noted, as these behaviours were viewed as part of the norm in military culture. Consequently, the participants engaged in behaviours they potentially saw as a form of social integration. Additionally, cited instances of offending while in were also attributed to acts of social conformity as a means to ensure their positions of standing within friendship groups were not at risk (Parsons, 2015). The participants have highlighted how a high level of vulnerability around wanting to

belong can influence the pathway towards offending. While research suggests that the participants could have been engaging in these behaviours as a meant to rebel, the findings also suggest an alternative. As such, the finding suggest that it was a combination of their age, feelings of social pressure and a desire to return to their 'old lives' that propelled many of them back towards offending, even while in military service (See: Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Pratt and Cullen, 2000).

7.8   The Path Back to Crime

Further, it appeared that for the participants in this study that the primary identities formed in their first institutions (i.e. the family) informed their second primary institutional identity (i.e. the failed military identity) to such an extent that their present institutional identity (i.e. an offender, a sex offender) was a seemingly logical progression. This is not to disregard the impact that a failed educational identity could have had on the participants, thus culminating in even more compounded negative identities to contend with. In this regard, it was the family that first instilled a negative view of the self that contributed to dysfunctional identities developing in the participants, which were enforced when they developed a 'failed' military identity. A culmination of these failed identities ultimately appeared to justify many of the participants' current 'failed' identity as an 'offender.

Throughout the participants' lives, they experienced a de-stabilisation in each of the total institutions in which they have transitioned back and forth between throughout their life histories (Goffman, 1957). Importantly, within each of this institutions, the participants appeared to experience a multitude of breaches of trust through periods of abandonment and abuse by their families, rejection in their educational institutions through exclusion, an apparent rejection by the military through the lack of or withdrawal of support, and an apparent rejection by the criminal justice system, through the lack of action taken when many of them were first involved with offending in their youths.

The final institution explored at the time of interview, the prison institution, felt in many instances, the worse of the institutional offenders. Had the participants been better supported when instances of offending first arose, the participants may have had better access to the support they were in so desperate need of when they were in their childhoods and early adolescence. For it was during these early periods throughout the participants lives that they needed the structure and accountability that the criminal

justice system is meant to provide through opportunities to engage in rehabilitation and gain access to help (Phelps, 2011).

Consequently, many of the participants cited seeking out relationships with individuals who may have been influential in their pathway towards criminological behaviours, as a means to develop a new identity away from their childhood histories and their failed training identities (Grady, Levenson and Bolder; 2017). Although acting in direct opposition of several of the participants cited aims at desistance, these relationships provided the participants with protection from the isolation and maltreatment experienced in childhood and early adolescence, therefore rationalising the participants' engagement (Malvaso, Delfabbro and Day, 2017). As such, it appeared as though those relationships were viewed as the participants' only outlet to develop some form of connectivity and social competence that was not influenced by the presence of the dysfunctional internal narrations developed in the participants pre-enlistment life stages (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986). Further, as a means of ensuring a sense of connectivity and belonging, several of the participants cited breaking regulations and engaged in offending early on in their military careers through periods of excessive use of alcohol and fighting (Thornicroft *et al.*, 2007; Wang *et al.*, 2007, Klik, Williams and Reynolds, 2019). Almost inevitably, many of these relationships formed through fighting and excessive alcohol use contributed to difficult training experiences or sanctions.

When many of the participants' cultural identities as soldiers were threatened, violence was sought out as a means to conform to the social identities they were trying to protect, rather than risking losing the presentation of manhood that they were attempting to project. Importantly, the participants' apparent lack of understanding around sexual and violent behaviours that stemmed from their earlier childhood experiences, combined with the militaries discretionary view towards formal sanctions' may have further influenced periods of recidivism (Briere, Kaltman, and Green, 2008). Subsequently, a lack of insight into the participants lived experiences and a lack of support in gaining access to these insights further influenced the participants' feelings of abandonment and isolation.

Importantly, the lack of support received during these periods appears to have compounded the internal barriers to help seeking the participants had expressed throughout their childhood. The military once again reminded the participants that they

were 'unworthy', just as the participants families had (Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen, 2010; Aguirre Velasco *et al.*, 2020). For the participants, periods of bullying, a lack of social belonging and difficulties assimilating to military life meant the participants were once again on the outside, just as they were in relation to their families, educational settings and social settings. Lastly, the participants cited a continued level of psychological unsafety throughout their training periods with instances of rejection and acceptance occurring on a pendulum. Subsequently impacting how the participants came to understand their new identities in the military and the change to their view of the self in the social context (Baumeister, 1986; Archer and Waterman, 1983). Once more the inconsistent messages provided by the military with regard to both sanctions and support further influenced how the participants understood their trajectories towards offending. Consequently, the participants viewed the military at considerable fault for not helping them, making them victims of injustice, not soldiers.

7.9   Unreliable Motivators to Desistance

7.9.1   The Presence of Families

For the participants in this study, the notion of family was explored through their childhood experiences of family and the families they developed prior to incarceration. During the military to civilian transition, research has found that a 'successful' transition relies on several factors acting in unison; utilising transitional services prior to a year of leaving the service, maintaining or seeking out positive mental health, maintaining a positive or realistic expectation around future employment, and developing good family relations (See: Maruna, 2012; Gil-Rivas *et al.,* 2017; Brewer and Herron, 2022). At the stage of transition, when the military is no longer in charge, the research has found that the family is seen as the primary support system to the veteran (Ware, 2012). To view families through a systems theory approach is to argue that senior leaders can play a major role in fostering systemic change towards a more family oriented military organisation. Through viewing the family as a whole system that can be utilised, the family becomes of more value to the military (Rodriguez, 2018). However, under the framework of the military acting as a total institution, it could be argued that this is intrinsically impossible as the military needs to maintain control over the individual (Goffman, 1957). Therefore, the military continues to treat the family as a stabilising force in a predominately capitalistic society, where costings reign superior to

the individual needs and everyone has a role to play. By viewing the family as the primary provider of care for service personnel and veterans, the military profits significantly from the veteran being seen as the family's 'responsibility', no longer under their duty of care (Goffman, 1957). As such, the family is seen to be 'taking back' the responsibility to provide housing, stability and structure, and serving its function (Parsons, 1959).

However, family breakdowns in particular have been cited as acting as a 'trigger' to the onset of psychological difficulties for the participants, as their families appeared to be 'falsely monolithic' and unable to function as a homogenous group (DeVault, 1991). Equally, military families range in organisation, culture, class, and structure in such a way that it is difficult to try to generalize about their actual functionality in an individual's life (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1982). Consequently, many of the participants returned home from military service to dysfunctional and dangerous home environments. Research has found that where financial difficulties, social isolation and a lack of suitable housing are present, recidivism rates have been found to increase (Brown, Spencer and Deakin, 2007; Tovey, Winder and Blagden, 2022). This is particularly relevant where social connectivity is less readily available due to family exclusion or community disengagement (Visher, Winterfield and Coggeshell, 2006; Healy, 2017). The lack of family support was particularly important to consider when exploring desistance amongst the participant population as families were cited as an important factor in the determination and willingness to desist from crime. Therefore, a lack of these positive influences may highlight their propensity to re-offend.

Unfortunately, following difficult transitions back into their home environment, several of the participants lost any remaining form of social support, further leading to increased periods of social isolation, drug and alcohol addiction and mental health challenges. Research has found that amongst issues relating to families, 23% of veterans in the UK reported not being able to talk to their family about transitional issues and 19% reported not having anyone to come home or having a close family member to talk to about transitioning, with the remaining addressing the transitional period as an afterthought (FiMT, 2015). For the participants in this study, the findings align with the current literature that suggests that a lack of communication or engaging in the

transitional process in isolation can contribute to family breakdowns, social isolation, homelessness and mental health challenges (Busuttil, 2010).

Importantly, the participants' reported in several instances that their families provided negative repercussions around extra caring responsibilities, negatively impacted the participants' financial security, hindered their employment earnings, and impacted their health and psychological wellbeing (Wakabayshi and Donato 2005). During periods of family breakdown and divorce, research has found that veterans are increasingly at risk to these negative consequences (Busuttil, 2010). The participants in this research study were not exempt from those findings, as the breakdown in their relationships often lead to periods of isolation and feelings of lonliness. Further, when many of the participants were experiencing family breakdowns, their families were viewed as a contributor to recidivism and not desistance. Once again highlighting how the 'type' (i.e. secure, stable, loving) of support available to justice involved veterans could be more important than simply have support.

Within the context of this research, the breakdown of the participants' young families contributed to further feelings of failure, isolation and lost identities. Although research has found that male combat veterans were 62% more likely than civilian males to have at least one failed marriage, many of the participants viewed their experiences with divorce as occurring in isolation (Karney *et al*., 2012). Prior to 2019, when the military changed its policy allowing co-habitating couples to live on base, marriage was seen as the only option for those wanting to live together. However, for the participants in this study, those changes in policy occurred too late. Consequently, the pressure to marry earlier than anticipated, the increase in stress and difficulty adjusting to family life lead to relationship difficulties and ultimately separation and divorce in many cases (Hill, 1949; Peebles- Kleiger and Kleiger, 1994).

For five of the participants in this study, deployment was cited as contributory to the breakdown of their relationships. For two of the participants, their separations occurred following their transition out of military service. A body of research highlights the consequences of deployment as the largest contributor to family separation and divorce (Karney *et al*., 2012; Marshall, Panuzio, and Taft, 2005). The continuation or a considerable number of deployments lasting longer than one year is reported to be a considerable stressor for military couples, impacting the number of families facing separation (Buckman *et al*., 2013; Murphy and Busuttil, 2014). Further, the research has

found that individuals who have experiences of base housing, research has found families are less likely to separate due to access to childcare, community and increased economic opportunities. While beneficial to the military family while in, once the civilian transition occurs, these opportunities lessen further impacting the likelihood of family difficulties (Buckman *et al.*, 2013). However, research into family breakdowns and engagement during the transition process is noted as limited as most studies focus on deployment implications rather than transitions (Sondergaard *et al.*, 2016). The findings of this research study suggest that it was a combination of negative views of the self, lost military identities and fears loneliness that were more influential than combat experience. Although with a smaller proportion of the participants experiencing combat, these findings are noted as limited.

Importantly, for several of the participants, the indoctrination into violence through experiences of domestic violence in childhood elicited a conflicted internal narrative around safety, families, masculinity and self-reliance which were reflected in their social and interpersonal relationships. Research has found that infidelity, poor mental health and intimate partner violence are also noted as contributors to family breakdowns for the veteran population (Buckman *et al.*, 2013; Murphy and Busuttil, 2014). It appeared that for the participants in this research study, experiencing violence at a young age further embedded the view that violence was an acceptable form of protection, communication and resolution (Moylan *et al.*, 2010; Pingley, 2017). As such, when participants cited experiences of domestic abuse, violence against their partners as a means communicate disappointment was seen as 'deserved' and engagement with violence on a personal level was seen as necessary to their identity as 'real men'. These narrations were unlikely to be challenged while in military service as the research has found that amongst the military population, partner violence has been found to be three times higher than in the civilian population (Marshall, Panuzio, and Taft, 2005). The high levels of violence could been attributed to the way in which individuals are socialised in the military with both males and females acting as perpetrators (Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019). However, the findings suggest that instances of domestic violence in childhood, dysfunctional views of masculinity and insecure views of the self, contributed to many of the participants being able to rationalise violence both in the home and in their military careers.

While there are notable gaps in the literature around the experiences of veterans families, research has called for more detailed accounts to be taken by the military at enlistment stage around family status, socio-economic status, relationship status, and reasons for leaving home to help inform what is known about military families (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011). However, there is an inequity that remains amongst military family research as priority is given to research that explores the experiences of the nuclear family with priority. This could be attributed to the media and policy propaganda that represents the nuclear family as the norm amongst military populations (Sullivan *et al.*, 2020). Equally, as the definition of the family continues to expand as society shifts and progresses, the military appears to remain steadfast in the nuclear family being given priority treatment with marriage education classes, housing priority and welfare support to families being given first priority (Ministry of Defence, 2022).

7.9.2   Future Families

For all but two of the participants, discussions around re-integration back into their communities and families was a welcomed distraction from discussions about their offences. Amongst them, the most commonly cited motivators towards desistance were cited as 'hope' for their futures, their next steps, for starting over, and for their loved ones. Where hopes for desistance were centred on conversations that included families, the primary motivator was that of parenthood and to be a 'good father', as illustrated by Nick:

> I say this now, while I'm in here but I don't want my kids to grow up without a father- Nick

However, amongst the participant population, these narrations were limited to two of the four participants who cited having contact with their children. For the remaining participants, hope, seen as a primary motivator towards desistance in the research, was cited by the participant as lacking in their views of the future due to a lack of support while incarcerated. As such, the participants often cited feelings of hopelessness, despair, anger, and loss when discussing their offending histories and any hopes for community re-integration (Bailey and Klein, 2018; Klein, Rukus, and Zambrana, 2012; Hosser, Windzio and Greve, 2007).

Therefore, the notion of family, seen as a positive motivator towards desistance for some, did not appear to be enough for the majority of the participant population as

their primary identities remained that of an offender, rather than a father (Abell, 2018). Importantly, a general lack of belonging due to family no longer being in communication with the participants was also influential to how the participants viewed family. While three of the participants cited appreciating their families and having communication with them, the remainder of the participants cited a lack of contact with their families since their incarceration. As the majority of the participants reported higher levels of adversity and trauma throughout their lives, the absence of family members was noted as 'unsurprising' to them. Importantly, it was the lack of family and social support that appeared to further embed the negative influence of the 'offender' identity.

Further to this, the 'sex offender' identity that many of the participants held was also highly influential to how the participants viewed their futures, potential for future relationships and their aims for desistance (Wamser-Nanney and Vandenberg, 2013; Hamilton, 2017). Consequently, the isolation that many of the participants may experience as a form of their own narrative and perceived identity of 'offender' may prove to be a motivator towards recidivism upon community re-integration (Copp *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the limited experiences the participants actually experienced in family life and the limited of periods belonging prior to incarceration may not accurately reflect how likely it is that family support and engagement will be with regard to being seen as a motivator to desistance (Blokland, Nagin and Nieuwbeerta, 2015; Jardine, 2015; Walker *et al.*, 2017).

For the majority of the participants, the absence of any prolonged opportunities to see themselves as 'successful', as 'a good father', as a 'soldier' due to the constant life transitions cited by the participants could have contributed to the apparent disconnect between what the participants cited they wanted with regard to families and their views on desistance as a whole. Throughout the interview process, it appeared as though the participants identities had been consistently challenged in their families, in the military and now, as both violent and sexual offenders (i.e. within each of their primary institutions) to such an extent that a lack of any period of reprieve to view themselves positively was absent in their life histories. Consequently, their views of the future were often overshadowed by feelings of hopelessness, which may compound the already present contributors to offending that the participants are contending with

(Goffman, 1957; Bailey and Klein, 2018; Klein, Rukus, and Zambrana, 2012; Hosser, Windzio and Greve, 2007).

For two of the participants, joining the military was perceived as a way to lessen their likelihood of recidivism. However, recollections of training experiences only further highlighted how the military further reinforced the negative behaviours that were learned in the participants' pre-enlistment lives, with priority given to the relationship between the military drinking culture and violence. Consequently, the findings suggest that it was the military environment that spurred an internal and often unconscious conflict between wanting to 'go straight' and wanting to 'take all the opportunities they could get' to engage in opportunities to belong amongst their military families, including through acts of violence (Cohen and Felson, 1979). For the participant group, there appears to be long standing implications for the 'old guard' mentality that the participants were trained in around violence and alcohol misuse as a conduit towards belonging. Importantly, the excessive alcohol use that was learned in military training was cited as contributory to several of the participants offending histories. As such, the findings highlight that many of the participants lacked insight into how alcohol misuse and drug use related to their dysfunctional cognitions towards violence. Consequently, many of the participants insights appeared to illustrate how likely the participants were to engage in recidivism due to dysfunctional views of their reasons for engaging in violent offending.

7.10 A Likely Return

The findings align with the research that suggests that viewing acts of violence in early developmental stages can instil a sense of comfortability with violence in particular. Subsequently, these acts are seen as a social norm that is standard and accepted across all social groups and therefore does not warrant consideration or concern (Tankard and Paluck, 2016). Where instances of adversity were cited by the participants, often proud narrations of violence in adolescence followed. Such examples included fighting on their estates, fighting against others who challenged their masculinity and fighting as a means to belong amongst their military counterparts. These engagements with violence further strengthened an internal rationale that equated violence with high self-worth and opportunities to engage in belonging (Abbiati *et al.*, 2014). Upon joining the military, they were given the former role of 'manager of violence', which aligned with their pre-enlistment views on violence. Once in the

military, to be seen as 'successfully violent' allowed the participants to see themselves through the lens of having a new social identity in which they could be successful individually and amongst the group (Pickett, Brewer and Silver, 2002; Brewer, 1991; MacCoun, 1996).

As illustrated by Jeffrey, many of the participants appeared to lack an understanding of how the trifecta that was childhood adversity, military training and youth offending contributed to their life trajectories:

> I'm not saying the army caused me to offend that's not- but it was a small part of a bigger jigsaw …there was things that I never did before I joined the army, I was never violent, never aggressive, and then within weeks of being in there, it was- I become a very different person.- Jeffrey

For many of the participants, the opportunity to utilise unchecked emotions in combat scenarios was cited as a primary motivator to joining. However, the military training they experienced did not differentiate between the importance of utilising violence in combat scenarios rather than as a means to act out feelings of discontent or rage. Further, as much of the training around fighting and combat skills occurred during the adolescent developmental stages in the participants lives, the participants often lacked the life experience to challenge the internal narratives needed to differentiate between 'necessary' violence and offending (Cloitre, Stovall-McClough, and Han, 2005; Dvir et al., 2014). Consequently, as a result of the combined lack of insight into their psychological wellbeing and the violence they experienced while in military service, many of the participants cited the inability to emotionally regulate and engage in help seeking. Ultimately leading to periods of violence throughout the participants lives (Cloitre, Stovall-McClough, and Han, 2005; Dvir et al., 2014).

As previous instances of violence had been sanctioned and often encouraged, experiencing premature discharge as a result of violent acts was a significant *turning point* in several of the participants' lives. Throughout many of the participants early stages in their military careers, the lack of formal consequences to violence provided a psychologically unsafe environment to which the participants could not differentiate between norms encouraged by the social collective (i.e. their CO's and fellow recruits) and those they knew to be illegal. Consequently, many of the participants appeared to be able to rationalise acts of violence as a means to retaliate against both the military and the world as they felt betrayed by their premature discharge.

Equally, the participants' high prevalence of sexual violence may be able to be related back to their negatives experiences in military service due to periods of de-masculinisation and isolation during the participants emerging adulthood stages. Research that speaks to sexual offending highlights how adversity in childhood can contribute to dysfunctional views on relationships, poor emotional regulation, and an inability for form positive and stable relationships in adulthood which lead to sexual offending (See: Lee *et al.,* 2002; Marshall, 2010; Grady, Levenson and Bolder, 2017). For many of the participants, the combined experience of maternal abuse, hyper masculine training experiences and dysfunctional views of themselves appeared to contribute to their willingness to engage in sexual violence. Amongst the participants who engaged in sexual offences against adult women, all but two reported instances of abuse and neglect by their maternal role models in childhood. As many theories of sexual offending exist, Marshall and Barbaree's Integrated Theory would be appropriate to consider when seeking to understand why veterans may be more likely to engage in violent and sexual offending (Marshall and Barbaree, 1990). The theory argues that developmental experiences, biological processes, cultural norms and psychological vulnerability combined can increase the likelihood of an individual engaging in sexual offenses (Marshall and Barbaree, 1990).

Within this framework, the damaging developmental experiences that involved maternal role models, combined with witnessing and experiencing domestic and sexual violence could have increased many of the participants vulnerabilities to this type of offending. Further, the high prevalence of adversity and trauma that went unresolved in the participants' lives could have contributed to the development of dysfunctional views on ways to regain the masculine identities they had lost while in military service. However, this framework does not fit for all of the participants as the two participants who reported offences against children, cited positive views of maternal role models (both mothers and grandmothers). Therefore, exploring the relationship between maternal maltreatment, hyper masculine military training and sexual offending remains contentious.

An additional challenge to understanding the relationship between military service and sexual offending was noted as a lack of opportunity to explore their difficult pre-enlistment experiences up until the point of incarceration. The research has found that a positive step towards desistance is noted as acknowledgement of the offences

committed and the impact of the crime (higher likelihood to re-offend (Braithwaite, 1989; Stone, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 2003). For all but two of the participants, there was an acknowledgment of guilt with regard to their offences, but the majority of the participants did not cite any reflective insights into the impact of their offences on their victims. Although, this line of questioning was not included in the interview schedule and therefore, was not often approached, the lack of acknowledgement around the participants' victims was noted. However, it is equally important to note that a lack of safe spaces to be reflective about their lived experiences throughout the participants' life course appears to have influenced their self-esteem, their developmental processes and their understanding of their crimes (Schneiders *et al.*, 2003; Gillies, 2003; Reit, 2017). Therefore, their likelihood to return may not be entirely in their control.

As such, the findings align with the research that suggests that the military was influential in the pathway towards offending for these individuals as there were consistent periods in which the participants were displaying a need for help and did not get it. Further, by containing the participants in a form of stasis, benefitting from the conflicting messages shared around violence and withholding formal consequences to violence in order to ensure the participants stayed compliant and part of the fighting force, the military appeared to be a significant influence in these participants pathway towards offending (Abu-Hayyeh and Singh, 2019; Buckman et al., 2013; Gordon, Burnell and Wilson, 2020). In many ways, the military could be considered an additional ACE in their life history, which further compounded the participants pathway to offending.

7.11 The Trifecta of Challenges: ACE's, MoD, and HMP

Research has a history of highlighting the risks to both the military and individuals when recruitment strategies target individuals who under the age of eighteen, come from disadvantaged backgrounds or lack educational qualifications (Haer, 2019; Abu- Hayyeh and Singh, 2019; Hagopian and Barker; 2011). The study provides new insight into the outcomes for this population, as its qualitative insights have provided a contextualised understanding of how adversity in childhood, military service and offending behaviour are linked across the life course.

For the participants in this research, it has been evidenced that joining the military at a young age created a perfect storm that encompassed their difficult childhood experiences and their existing propensity to engage in offending behaviours.

Within this context, the military was viewed as a reliable institution that could mould them or protect them. However, the lack of pseudo parental guidance and support provided by the military once in service, appeared to further enhance feelings of abandonment and loneliness that catalysed them towards future offending, in the absence of support or alternatives to guide them away from this path (Chowdry, Crawford and Goodman, 2011). As such, the research has found that individuals with difficult life histories are more vulnerable to experiences of adversity in childhood, lacking formal literacy skills and lacking the lived experiences necessary to assimilate into institutions like the military (Iversen et al., 2007; Wilson, Hill and Kiernan, 2018). As highlighted by the participants, ignoring those risks was cited as a contributor to the participants offending histories:

> The army changes you…instead of constantly fucking saying nothing…make them see someone because you get in trouble for not…it's constant, constant, like our camp was a mess, it was like a year there was like four boys just steaming and nothing. (Stephen)

Significantly, all but one of the participants cited pre-enlistment instances of offending. Although many of the participants cited their youth offences under the guise of 'trouble' or 'mischief', the actions described would align with formal descriptions of offending behaviours (i.e. engagement in gang violence, theft, arson, and property damage). It appeared by the participants' recollections that the military treated repeated instances of offending involving excessive drinking, drink driving, and violence in a similar fashion, as just 'troubles'. Subsequently, the participants often lacked a formal understanding of what acceptable behaviour was while in the military and at what stage consequences would ensue.

Furthermore, the concept of being held in 'stasis' by the military was noted by several of the participants in relation to understanding their offending histories while in the military. Many of the participants cited feeling as though the military expected recruits to follow orders as if they were a child following the rules of the household. Until faced with disciplinary action, when the military responded to the recruits as though they were adults with disciplinary actions, sanctions and discharge. The conflicting nature in which the military treated the participants is highlighted here by Keith, who further addressed how the conflicting way in which the military provided support hindered help seeking:

> We don't know what we could or couldn't get help with, most of the time, would keep them at arm's length. –Keith

The literature suggests that individuals who commit crimes prior to the age of thirteen benefit from strategic and consistent interventions to prevent further offending (Loeber and Farrington, 2001). For the participants in this study, the lack of intervention in their pre-enlistment lives through to emerging adulthood appeared to contribute to their limited understanding of how offending could impact their military and civilian life trajectories. As such, several of the participants cited numerous occasions of recidivism that could have been prevented had the military intervened sooner. These findings, extracted from the rich life histories of the participants, significantly develops what is currently known about the relationship between military service and offending, by highlighting the role of pre-enlistment factors and the relationship between adversity, military service and offending.

It can be not understated that the military is not responsible for pre-enlistment acts of deviance of any recruits. However, this study has provided new evidence to indicate that where recruitment targets rely on individuals who are still developing their sense of morality, identity and value system, the military has an obligation to train these individuals with this in mind, without exception to those who do not report a history of offending prior to enlistment. As such, the military has an obligation to ensure there is a shared valued consensus around unsolicited violence, excessive alcohol intake and acts of sexual violence with the highest priority.

7.12 Supporting Justice Involved Veterans in Theory and Practice

The conundrum of putting research into action often lies in the difficult task of balancing the 'optimal' and the 'tangible' ways in which the research can be applied to current practice. Issues around housing, poor transitional opportunities, unemployment and underemployment were highlighted by the participants as contributors to their difficult life histories. Unfortunately, many of the recommendations that would be appropriate to highlight here would be reiterations of historic calls to action that continue to go unresolved (See: Iversen *et al.*, 2008; Dandeker *et al.*, 2006; van Staden *et al.*, 2007; Morin, 2011; Brewer and Herron, 2022). Consequently, the key message from the present study has focused on the accessibility of help seeking advertisements and literature, the need for transitional support into the military based on a needs assessment taken at intake and the provision of timely mental health literacy training and support for military personnel as a means to support offending and desistance.

7.12.1 Rebalancing the Training Experience

Research has argued that the military engagement process is more aligned to 'cultural shock' than institutionalisation, with the view that veterans returning to civilian life should be able to view the transition as a 'reverse' out of the military with relative ease depending on their service history (Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014; Wadham and Morris 2019). The individual viewpoint of the personnel's time in service is therefore considered a key component of what constitutes a 'successful' transition. As such, the way in which the individual views their time in the military is impactful throughout all stages of their military life. Therefore, the transition into the military should be treated with the same level of rigour that is provided to some of the transitional support systems available to veterans.

Further, an additional component of the 'successful' transitions considers the service personnel's' individual expectations placed on the military. Therefore, in the beginning stages of recruitment and training, armed forces personnel should be encouraged to understand the culture and realities of military service. Equally, the recruitment strategies should be adjusted to reflect the reality of the todays military (i.e. less time overseas, more training in the UK, fewer housing opportunities etc). To view the military as being a career opportunity with priority, the experience of 'culture shock' can be seen as a temporary stage in which an individual can adjust to their new surroundings given enough time (Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014; Wadham and Morris 2019). For those who view the military as a career, an early discharge can be impactful but not life altering. By viewing the negative associations aligned with transitioning into the military as temporary, the research suggests that veterans are capable of navigating themselves through military subscription without the more difficult experiences associated with institutionalisation (Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014). However, the findings of this research study suggest that the military was not meeting the participants' expectations at the time of their service and ultimately, it was these unmet expectations that contributed to their pathway towards offending in many ways.

7.12.2 Securing the Veteran Identity

Amongst the veteran population, there is a discourse about the military service characteristics that align with the definition of the veteran (Burdett *et al*., 2012). Further, in some locations throughout the UK (i.e. Northern Ireland), there is a moral

panic that contributes to a veteran being reluctant to identify as such. Further, where instances of offending are involved, the media has historically contributed to a social narrative that villainess military personnel as a means to perpetuate the stereotype that the military creates offenders (Bouffard, 2013; Shepherd, Kay and Gray, 2019; Jakobsen, 2000). As such, many veterans do not formally identify themselves as a 'veteran', influencing both research and political understandings of the veteran experience. Exploring veteran identity through an interpersonal lends, the research has found that an individual that is part of their 'chosen' institution will benefit from the self-identities that can develop over their life course, as the need for belonging is strengthened by the acceptance that is given to them by said institution (Grimell, 2018b).

To be viewed as having 'institutional membership' amongst the Armed Forces is important to those who view their time in as a form of self-sacrifice with a strong sense of their military identity. It is the sense of belonging in both the military and amongst the veteran community that secures the veterans identity as they transition into civilian life. These feelings of connectivity, success and belonging are what informs not only their worldview but also their next stages of life (Albertson, 2019; Burdett *et al*., 2012; Doe, 2020). Further, the presence of strong veteran identity can influence an individual's personal and community identity and their willingness to engage in help seeking when appropriate (Albertson, 2019; Burdett *et al*., 2012; Doe, 2020). However, should an individual not meet their personal expectations or the expectations of the military through early or dishonourable discharge, the sense of loss and confliction with their military identity can confound their ability to self-identity as a veteran during the re-integration process (Beder, 2012).

For the veterans represented in this study, the loss of their military identity triggered a sense of rejection from the military institution that could not be understated. Therefore, developing clear guidance about what constitutes a 'veteran' in the policy forums and ensuring this message is echoed from the enlistment stages and beyond is an important recommendation from the findings. Importantly, as loss of military identity was cited a contributor to offending for several of the participants, there are considerations around the social economics of ensuring targeted support is provided to veterans as soon as they become one.

Further, within the context of early service leavers, the type of support available appears to be negligent. The research illustrates how process of enlisting should be considered an essential *turning point* in the individuals' life and the process of defining their military identity strengthens at enlistment, rather than begins (Elder Jr. and Giele 2009; Lichtwarck-Aschoff *et al.*, 2008). To view an early service leaver as having a 'strengthened' veteran identity, rather than a 'new' veteran identity could explain why early service leavers in particular may experience difficulties in transitioning out of the military prematurely. As the individual would not be subjected to long periods of de-stabilization, the amount of time in service would not be relevant (Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg, 2014). Yet, the time they had perceived themselves as part of the military culture would be relevant. Therefore, support for individuals who are not successful in joining or who are not successful in the early stages of their military careers should be considered with a higher priority.

7.12.3 Challenging Masculine Stereotypes around Help Seeking

The subject of literacy was raised as a way to understand the participants' apprehension to engage in help seeking throughout the earlier stages of their military careers. Posters and booklets were noted as available to the participants; however, many of the participants described difficulty reading those materials with the similar difficulty they had accessing command and mission materials. In organisations where individuals are known to have low literacy rates or limited cognitive functioning due to trauma, written and verbal iterations of mental health support should be written in such a way that counteract feelings of shame and mistrust with health professionals (Dewalt *et al.*, 2004; Easton, Entwistle and Williams, 2013; Snow, McLean, and Frederico, 2020). Consequently, the inability to be successful in education had further implications for several of the participants as they reported their 'only' worth as being tied to their ability to engage as 'managers of violence' through fighting as a form of self-protection or as a means to socially belong prior to military service.

Importantly, literacy as a barrier to help seeking appeared to be as influential as shame and social stigma for several of the participants. Several of the participants felt the military perceived those who engaged in help seeking as lacking self-reliance and discipline (Easton, Entwistle and Williams, 2013; Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen, 2010). Therefore, individuals designing mental health resources should consider the masculine undertones that exist in the military and avoid using challenging language or

language that implies vulnerability. While the literature is limited with regard to masculine identities, help seeking and literacy in the context of military service, by reframing help seeking behaviours away from being seen as an individual vulnerability, some individuals may increase their likelihood to ask for support (Reit, 2017). An example of how these findings can be put into practice is illustrated by Jeffrey:

> I: If the flyer said, "Would you like help, a support for your family, would you…?"
>
> V: That would be more likely, or we're here to help or something like that, but it's very hard to work it. Just put a "Phone this, asshole and you can get help for this." See that would work." – (Jeffrey)

Jeffrey illustrated how language can lessen the stigma around help seeking when transitioning into and out of military identities as the focus is on giving a command or redirecting the personal nature of the help seeking act. Both actions have position connotations when considering how the military trains individuals to be compliant, resilient and responsible for others. In addition to this, by reframing help seeking as being for the 'greater good', an individual who engaged in military service as a means to 'serve their country' may view accessing help as a duty rather than a detriment to their career.

Additionally, the participants highlighted how refocusing help seeking materials to remove personal connotations and refocus on the benefits to family members or community members could improve help seeking behaviours (See: Appendix Eleven). As families were explored with a high prevalence in this study, both in the context of pre-enlistment families and the families that the participants developed over time, the issue of help seeking should be considered a family concern as well. Had the family members of the participants been better supported throughout their individual transitions, family breakdowns may be been prevented.

Further, by considering the recommendations around challenging hyper masculine stereotypes to help seeking and showcasing the impact that help seeking can have on interpersonal relationships, accessing support may become more feasible to the veteran population. The impact of removing unconscious biases, feelings of shame and stigma cannot be understated. Given that trust, social stigma, and fear were cited as barriers to help seeking, the inability to access materials due to poor literacy and shame are potential challenges that can be overcome.

7.12.4 Working Smarter and Not Harder

Transitional support when entering into the military is recommended as a means to support recruits entering military service from disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e. economical, educational, and geographical). The current provision of training includes educational, social and psychological support provided to new recruits regardless of their branch or entry rank (MoD Independent Advisory Panel, 2021). However, the findings of this research have identified that the primary contributors to early discharge for almost all of the participant population was poor mental health literacy, poor financial literacy and social isolation. Subsequently, further education about identity formation and life transitions for those entering the military during their adolescence or emerging adulthood has the potential to lessen entry challenges for individuals with limited experiences in these areas. Equally training that addresses many of the difficulties that young people face also has the opportunity to increase positive experience of communication which were cited as lacking in these participants lives. The lack of experiences in asking for help subsequently hindered the participants' willingness to seek support in times of distress. Training that increases communication in this area and provides recruits with new and positive experiences of help seeking could improve training experiences and potential career trajectories.

Importantly, a training programme that addresses identity and life stage development has the opportunity to open up conversations about the military acting as an employment provider, rather than as an institution which fully absorbs an individual's life. By lessening the importance placed on the military identity, the military is supporting a healthier viewpoint towards identity shifts when transitioning from military to civilian life. Although more 'idealistic' rather than 'realistic' in its' current form, the research highlights how a calculated ranking system that pre-emptively streamlines new recruits into 'targeted' workshops or courses could potentially decrease the likelihood of early contract termination for some and lessen any military to civilian transitional difficulties for others. While the military reports accounting for adverse childhood experiences and pre-enlistment traumas at intake, nuances around educational attainment, poor family relationships, a lack of mental health or financial literacy or difficulty adjusting to transitional periods can be missed. As such, intake assessments could include questions on trust, views of the self, career aspirations, motivations for joining and potential barriers for success. The questions

could be designed to emphasise the importance of honesty as the intention is not to diminish recruitment but to streamline new recruits in a similar way that educational assessments do.

The recruitment officers would then be provided with a quantitative representation of the recruits 'areas of risk', which could be used to mitigate any 'potential' challenges for the new recruits based on their needs assessment, without increasing their workload (Andrews, Bonta and Wormith, 2016). Consequently, new recruits may experience less transitional difficulties when coping with changes to their identities, interpersonal relationships, home lives, routines, and career pathways upon entering military service as they will be in receipt of targeted support. Importantly, the rationale for a system such as this is not meant to exclude individuals who may have experienced pre-enlistment challenges but to provide them the appropriate level of support from the offset. As such, the development of a programme such as this has the potential to improve the overall military experience for new recruits, potentially increasing their capability and willingness to fulfil their service contract. Subsequently, saving the military valuable training and financial resources.

7.12.5 Mental Health Competency as a Requirement

Finally, the findings of this study support the need for mental health literacy to be a requirement, rather than a recommendation, for service personnel at various stages of their military career, as poor mental health literacy has been found to correlate with offending behaviour, limited help seeking, and high rates of recidivism (Fraser, 2017; Domino *et al.*, 2019; Morgan *et al.*, 2012). Reiterations of poor emotional regulation, feelings of disillusionment with the military and symptomology that could be aligned with PTSD were cited by almost all of the participant population. However, all but two lacked any formal mental health diagnosis or cited positive experiences with mental health professionals throughout their life course. Equally, the lack of mental health language, opportunities for safe self-analysis and ongoing support has the potential to contribute to periods of recidivism as a consequence of having little understanding about their life histories (Kirkwood, 2015; Wallace and Wang, 2020).

Although housing, employment support, and community reintegration programmes remain equally important in the discourse around veteran's needs, mental health was a primary contributor to both premature discharge and offending for the

majority of the participant population. Due to a lack of basic mental health literacy, more than half of the participant population appeared to have little insight into their internal worldviews, their offending histories and their likelihood to re-offend upon release. In the case of one participant, a lack of mental health support was directly cited as a reason he felt desistance was unlikely for him.

Therefore, the provision of consistent training, workshops or educational seminars on the various developmental stages young adults transition through and various mental health challenges could support military personnel away from offending, both in service and in civilian life (Skeem, Manchak and Peterson, 2010; Williston *et al.*, 2020; Taylor *et al.*, 2020). As policy supports the provision of mental health education in military recruits presently (See: MoD Independent Advisory Panel, 2021), the inclusion of more extensive educational opportunities in this area has the potential to provide individuals with the language and confidence needed to engage in help seeking when appropriate. Consequently lessening the impact of one of the key contributors (i.e. poor mental health literacy) to offending that was noted by the majority of the participant population.

The 'ideal' implementation of this research may appear untenable, as recommendations for addressing these challenges has been at the forefront of several policy recommendations for some time. Current policies advocate for the stronger provision of mental health and community support for veterans with priority (See: Veterans Strategy Action Plan: Public Health England, 2019; The Armed Forces Covenant: The Strategy for our Veterans, 2018; The Strategy for Our Veterans: refreshed action plan: The Scottish Government, 2022). However, the gaps that have been identified around identity transitions and targeted support upon entry are missing from the veterans' support discourse. Although the MoD is not responsible for the pre-enlistment experiences of recruits, where recruits are recruited from disadvantaged communities, there is a responsibility to acknowledge how these backgrounds can influence an individual's trajectory into military service. While best practice for the military community is being addressed through various organisations, charities, the Office for Veteran's Affairs and the Armed Forces Covenant, there is a long way to go to ensure that lived experiences of future veterans are not overshadowed by the military's past mistakes (The Armed Forces Covenant, 2018).

7.13 Limitations of the Study

Throughout the interview process, several of the participants cited a lack of experience discussing their life histories, which contributed to a sense of vulnerability at times. Consequently, as a means to avoid difficult topics, especially when the subject of their offences arose, some of the participants attempted to bypass responding to a specific question as illustrated below:

> It is the fifth, isn't it? What else do you want to know?...What do you know about cheerleaders? – Nick

As a result of not always having the confidence to refocus both the participant and myself, there was an abundance of data that was retrieved that did not necessarily align with the research questions. Equally, where small instances of redirection occurred, they were not necessarily done well and opportunities to explore key topics such as family support and masculinity were missed due to a lack of experience and confidence in formal research interviews.

Reflecting on the research process, while attempting to avoid a conscious or unconscious bias from forming, I chose to not have access to the participants offending histories prior to their interviews. While I would not necessarily approach future research differently, there were deficits to not knowing their histories prior to the interview. By knowing their offending histories prior to the interview, I could have addressed their offences in a more structured format which could have supported a deeper coproduction of knowledge when the subject of offending arose. However, when considering lessons learned for future research, having supplemental questions prepared for those who disclose serious and sexual offences in particular would be advisable. As the questions on the interview schedule were open ended and allowed the participants to dictate much of the interview, where complex life histories arose, I felt unprepared and inexperienced with regard to the 'types' of questions that could have provided a deeper level of understanding about why they offended in the ways they did. As participants with sexual offending histories can be more challenging to access from a research design and ethics standpoint, having these questions prepared ahead of time could be seen to provide for more 'opportune' data.

On the other hand, being unaware of the participants histories allowed me to engage in the research process with a level of authenticity to which I felt they deserved. It felt at times that the participants appreciated being able to share their experiences

outside of their dossier dictating to me what their offending histories were. However, as a result of this, the participants were free to manipulate their life histories, protect themselves by disclosing 'half-truths' or dive right into the research questions as they saw fit. For the majority of the participants, the coproduction of this knowledge felt authentic, vulnerable, and purposeful. The interview was treated as a journey we were embarking on together, with no judgement about their offences or their lived experiences. However, two some instances, a less than authentic process occurred, which ultimately influence how I experienced, translated and analysed the interviews. Importantly, there is a body of research that explores experiences similar to mine (See: Dresser, 2013; San, 2006; Heffernan and Ward, 2019). Therefore, upon further research and reflection, I was able to understand than when research interviews occur in institutionalised settings, participants are understood to often narrate their life histories in a way that protects them from any perceived judgement or to protect themselves from reliving those experiences without access to mental health support following the interview process.

As the participants were recruited from prisons with similar demographic veteran populations, the study is limited in its contribution to what is known about veterans who are involved in the criminal justice system that do not identify as heterosexual, Caucasian and male. Although an attempt was made to speak with a diverse range of participants, the participants in many ways are representative of the lack of diversity seen throughout the UK military as a whole. Further, the hierarchy that society has imposed on veteran research has led to an underrepresentation of research that speaks to the experiences of female and diverse populations in the military (See: The Armed Forces Covenant, 2018; Street *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, the literature speaks very little of cultural, religious and sexual identities in the military and therefore, this research had very little to build upon and even less to contribute to that narrative. This is not to argue population statistics or to engage in a dialogue around the deficit of diverse research in a diverse world. However, a limitation to any good research is a lack of representation amongst its underpinnings. To rely on research that is largely homogenous in nature provides a barrier to the exploration of how singular experiences can affect wider populations. I would argue that this is a limitation to the transferability of the knowledge obtain from this study to a wider veteran population.

In addition to this, the use of text heavy recruitment and consent forms impeded much of what the participants understood about the study prior to taking part. At the introduction stage, participants were asked to sign the consent forms and were queried about any questions relating to the study. Within the first ten minutes of the interview, six of the participants disclosed difficulty accessing the consent forms and the questionnaires. Had the participants been fully aware of the scope of the study, they may have chosen to withdraw. Therefore, it can be assumed that the inability to fully grasp the research subject could have impeded the study in some ways. Future research should consider the literacy rates of military personnel when framing the research questions in order to ensure accessibility and comfortability of the participant population (NIACE, 2013; Louise, Hunter and Zlotowitz, 2016). Therefore, a revised version of the recruitment flyer has been provided to illustrate these recommendations in action (See Appendix Twelve).

Justifiably, utilising both IPA and TA could be considered a limitation of the study due to the limited amount of research that utilises both methodologies in the field of social sciences. I would not necessarily recommend this form of enquiry as there were times when I could not always break through the data without wanting to break down due to the amount of data that was presented and the demands of both methodologies. However, the use of both methodologies opened a line in enquiry and exploration which provided a richness within the data that may have been missed had the study utilised a different approach.

Importantly, the research team as a whole was affected by a gap in the provision of information and support that is provided to adult learners and supervisors of students with learning disabilities, which in turn influenced the length of the research study. While many universities have support in place for undergraduate students, there is a considerable gap in the provision of educational assessments and support for adult learners seeking to conduct research at a post graduate level. Although this research has successfully navigated these challenges due to a combined effort from the university, the supervisory team and the researcher, the field of Academia as a whole is encouraged to increase funding to student services departments in order to better support students with a range of learning challenges. By providing stronger support to these departments, universities are in a better position to lessen delays to research projects, increase student

mental health, provide more substantiated support to supervisors and ultimately,

increase research outputs and student retention.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This study sought to understand the experiences of veterans who are often overshadowed by their more 'successful' brethren. With limited resources to support a growing population of veterans in the UK, often those who have involvement with the criminal justice are difficult to access and overlooked by the Ministry of Defence. Equally, essential research that advocates for a larger provision of support to these individuals is challenging to conduct due to funding limitations, access limitations and an apparent stigma that surrounds research in the field of mental health, help seeking, and veteran identity. While the discourse around veteran needs is increasing in the acute services (i.e. housing charities, the NHS, prison services), there remains a gap in what is known about the relationship between military service and offending over the life course. This study has shed new light on how influential families are to the military to civilian transition as pre-enlistment experiences can impact the transition into and out of military service. Further, the study has highlighted how unmet expectations on behalf of veterans can lead to difficulties while in which contribute to instance of premature discharge. The study has contributed new insights into what is known about the relationship between poor literacy, detrimental views of masculinity and help seeking. Finally, the study has provided new insights into how the aforementioned relationship can contribute to periods of serious offending for some.

8.1 Finding Answers

This study has given voice to fifteen veterans who are marginalised in terms of their representation in both research and policy contexts. The participants, who often shared their life histories under the guise of helping others, appeared to benefit from the opportunity to share their experiences and provided unique insights which are otherwise unexplored in existing literature as many of them lacked this experience prior. The sensitively designed qualitative approach of the study enabled many of the participants to explore and reflect on their mostly difficult childhoods, their reasons for joining the military, their losses, their fears and their disbelief at how their lives had become tangled in the criminal justice system with an openness unanticipated. It was through these interview interactions that several of the participants appeared to have their life stories illuminated for them for the very first time. While each story was different in almost every way, there were significant points of divergence in the narratives of the

participants that gave some insight into the question posted in the introduction: simply put 'what went wrong?'

8.2 Understanding the Answers

Throughout this thesis, the research questions posed within Chapter Two have been answered to the extent that they could be within the limited framework that a doctoral thesis provides. The characteristics and the experiences of the participants were explored from childhood to adulthood, which showcased how different lived experiences can result in similar pathways to offending and similar views on offending behaviour. The factors that contributed to the participants' positionality as both veterans and offenders are now somewhat better understood to be related to a myriad of challenges present from early childhood. Finally, the research has uncovered several policies that could be re-imagined to support veterans from difficult backgrounds going through the military to civilian transition.

Further, the findings spoke to the prevalence of abuse, neglect and trauma in the participants' childhoods, which was often unexamined and unresolved. For the majority of the participants, narrations of lost childhoods were seen as a 'normal' and a part of growing up in the socio-economically deprived areas of Scotland in which they were born. Very rarely did the participants appear to make outward connections between their histories of violence, sexual abuse and neglect, their anger and their offending histories. Their life histories were simply par for the course. However, with every iteration of abuse and neglect, small hints of understanding were conveyed by several of the participants, to the extent that some of the participants requested 'permission' to keep talking about their lives.

As such, many of the participants lacked basic mental health awareness and reported a considerable deficit in how they understood their life histories and their reasons for offending. For many of the participants in this study, it was continuous breaches of trust by those in positions of power which influenced the participants' willingness to engage in help seeking. Importantly, a particularly strong finding of the research identified how the participants' deficit in the provision of mental health support over the course of their lives could have contributed to their offending histories. Further, where the participants did have experiences of help seeking, the majority cited being told to 'man up', 'grow up' or 'carry on' throughout their childhoods. The continuous diminishing of their lived experiences contributed to the participants' hiding

what they were experiencing, while enforcing a feeling of hopelessness around their ability to access the help they knew they needed.

This study further highlighted how little is known about the relationships that exist between adversity in childhood, experiencing overtly masculine military training, and violent and sexual offending. The findings suggest that early experiences of violence and sexual abuse contributed to the many of the participants holding dysfunctional views of how violence and overtly masculine acts are necessary to ensure safety and opportunities of belonging. These viewpoints were often perpetuated during military service to such an extent that many of the participants viewed acts of violent offending as necessary in order to develop, retain or regain their 'manhood'. Importantly, the findings of the study highlight how compounded traumas and swift transitions between life stages can prevent individuals from understanding their life histories to such an extent that they lack an understanding around their pathway to offending. These revelations were particularly noticeable in the participants who were incarcerated for sexual offences. Therefore, with a sense of urgency, the stronger provision of mental health support to military personnel and veterans is advocated for. It is clear that the lack of opportunity to discuss pre-enlistment challenges, military traumas and the military to civilian transition contributed greatly to the participants' trajectory towards offending. Had the provision of mental health support been available to the participants, they may have had the opportunity to discuss and learn to mitigate their difficult life histories. Consequently, without it, their distorted views of violence, masculinity and the military contributed to their creation of victims.

Once more, the findings of the study highlight how the military contributed to, rather than prevented further instances of loss and trauma as a means to ensure their 'fighting force' were fully immersed in military culture. While the military provides welfare officers, counselling support and marriage 'training' to support those going through multiple transitions at once, an individual must be emotionally prepared to access these resources. Without prior experience of help seeking, accessing these types of support may seem impossible. Consequently, a lack of psychological resilience was cited by several of the participants as contributing to their inability to be successful when asked to isolate from their pre-enlistment social groups, engage in acts of violence under the guise of training and engage in excessive alcohol use as a means to belong within military culture.

Further, many of the participants expressed feelings of anger and disappointment that the military accelerated their transitions into adulthood through acts of violence and exploitation. Although each participant narrated their experiences without direction or prompting, each one told stories of hyper masculine abuse that led to their losing any sense of psychological safety within the training environment. These experiences contributed to feelings of betrayal, anger and disillusionment with military. The compounded influence of overtly masculine training experiences, poor psychological resilience and a lack of social belonging was evidenced in many of the participants offending histories. Importantly, many of the participants reported a lack of considerable insight into how their views on masculinity, violence and sexual offending impacted their person identities and their social worlds, potentially increasing their likelihood to re-offend.

While not all who grow up in such difficult circumstances go onto offend in the manner in which these men have, the compounded losses and traumas that were experienced illustrate how there may be a particular population of individuals that are not suited to the insecurity and untenable nature of military life. Where service personnel were deemed unsuitable for military life during the initial training period, the findings suggest that considerations around suitable housing, financial literacy support and psychosocial support upon discharge could have eased the transition back into civilian life. This study has highlighted how 'disposable' the participants felt as a consequence of their swift transition out of military life. Although many of the participants cited wanting out of the military, the instantaneous way in which the military discharged them without support both compounded past traumas and ignited new ones. It therefore provides unique insight into the ways in which this disillusionment with military service can contribute to offending across the life course.

For the participants in this study, the lack of preparation for discharge compounded previously held negative views of the self to such an extent that many of the participants rejected their veteran identity entirely. As such, when the participants required support during the military to civilian transition, there was an unwillingness to engage with the support available to the veteran community, due to a lack of connectivity to their military lives. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the MoD has a responsibility to ensure considerable forethought around pre-enlistment experiences is given to each applicant prior to transitioning both in and out of military service.

Additionally, where recruits are accepted into military culture, regardless of social demographics, gender or sexual orientation, the military has an obligation to follow that recruit through to their civilian transition, regardless of the circumstances of their discharge as a matter of respect and admiration for their commitment to their country.

8.3   Looking to the future: Policy Recommendations

A further contribution of this study lies in the potential theoretical and policy recommendations that have arisen from the findings. By exploring the findings from an interdisciplinary approach, several theoretical recommendations emerged. By looking at the findings through a psychological and sociological lens, the importance of educational opportunities around life stage development, identities, transitions, and mental health was highlighted with significance. Training such as this could help lessen the impact of transitioning out of the military prior to the end of contract, should a recruit be deemed unsuitable for military life in the early training stages. As such, this research advocates once more for armed forces personnel to receive training in these areas early in the training process before the prospect of prematurely leaving arises. Further, as the military has recently increased the recruitment age of recruits, for much of the veteran population over the age of thirty, considerations around their age at recruitment should be made when determining the appropriate veteran transitional support programme, as this research has showed that being recruited at a young age can significantly alter an individuals life course.

Importantly, as families are impacted by the military to civilian transition as well, policies that include the provision of support to veterans' families is equally advocated for. When asked about how the military could support veteran families, the participants expressed feelings of abandonment by the military when the relationships encouraged by the military broke down. Consequently, many of the participants blamed the military for their failed marriages and broken families as the priority was placed on 'cutting the grass', rather than on the wellbeing of the participants. Sadly, the ramifications of forced transitions were experienced not only by the participants, but by their families and their children as well. Within the interviews, many of the participants evaded conversations about their children. However, when children were mentioned, these conversations were, without exception, discussed with a tone of sadness and loss. Had the military provided more extensive support for the participants who were forced into marital and family life prematurely, the lives of their children may have had a

different trajectory. Those in a position of power to reframe housing and welfare support policies in the military should consider temporary housing opportunities for those in newer relationships or scaled benefit systems to discourage recruits from marrying prematurely or as a means to gain access to a particular benefit.

Over the last ten years, the military has gone to great lengths to develop stronger support systems for active armed forces personnel and veterans. In many ways, the armed forces now are unrecognisable compared to the armed forces the participants experienced. However, the current provision of transitional support could be strengthened by exploring the policy recommendations made in the discussion chapter. For example, the development of policies that require service personnel to attend transitional support training towards the end of their military careers in order to receive benefits and final salaries could potentially influence how some veterans experience the military to civilian transition. Further increasing their likelihood to experience a 'positive' transition out of military service.

Noted throughout this thesis, many of the current policies employed by the military are illustrated as purposeful and beneficial to the military community. However, there are considerable financial and social implications for developing stronger policies that speak to the development of pre-enlistment training programmes and stronger veteran transitional support. Should recommendations for more extensive pre-enlistment assessments and pre-training programmes be deemed unsuitable, the military would benefit from re-examining just how costly those with lost identities can be to the social order of the military as either an institution or an employer.

8.4   With Thanks to the Scottish Prison Service

For the Scottish Prison Service, the findings illustrated two primary motivators towards desistance for the participants. First, the findings highlighted the benefit of the VICSO programme and how influential the feeling of belonging was to the participants as a result of their support. The participants cited a sense of loyalty and appreciation towards the VICSO's that cannot be understated. Several of the participants cited being part of the veterans only events as the only time the men got to engage in safe conversations about their time in the military. Where previous research has illustrated the potential dangers for veterans to self-disclose their military history due to fears of retaliation or acts of violence, the coffee mornings in particular were seen as a safe haven by the participants. As desires for belonging and periods of isolation and

loneliness were echoed throughout the participants' life histories, these small moments of connectivity cannot be trivialized. As VICSO's, for the participants in this study, only feelings of value and respect were iterated. From the researcher perspective, I can only second their sentiments. The commitment of the VICSO's was noted as continuous and invaluable to the lives of the incarcerated veterans that I spoke to.

Second, the findings highlighted less positive lessons learned from the participants' views of desistance. In each of the interviews, a lack of mental health support was mentioned as being directly related to their offending histories. For six of the participants, a lack of mental health support from their first period of incarceration was cited as a direct reason for their subsequent extensive offending histories. Further, in several instances, the veterans reported a lack of access to prescribed medication, a lack of timely mental health support, and a lack of support in gaining a formal diagnosis for what they believed was combat related PTSD. The call for a better funding and more extensive support programmes in the area of mental health has been made in previous research, with many great improvements being made where possible. However, it is appropriate to state here that the findings suggest that a lack of mental health literacy, support and formal treatment contributed to many of the participants instances of recidivism since leaving the military. Therefore, there is a burden of responsibility that must be placed on those who have the challenging role of ensuring adequate care is provided to incarcerated veterans.

8.5 Looking to the Future: Future Research

Given the high prevalence of serious and sexual offences reported within this study, the findings suggest that the military has a responsibility to understand and address how individuals who may be vulnerable to distorted views on violence, through experiences of adversity or trauma in particular, are trained in combat readiness. For that reason, further research into any relationships that exist between military service and the prevalence of sexual offending amongst incarcerated veterans is advocated for. Notably, further research into this subject could provide the evidence required needed to accelerate the changes the armed forces is actively making to address the high prevalence of offending amongst active armed forces personnel and veterans. Should the military wish to lessen the negative consequences of military culture, the development of more inclusive and gender-neutral training is advocated for. While the military machine must keep to the original mandate of conflict preparation, as well as

self and unit preparation, a more socially responsible training environment is advocated for.

Therefore, further research into the benefits and deficits of overtly masculine military training as a means to understand how training experiences influence civilian offending is recommended. Research into this subject area could provide further insight into ways in which the military can continue to meet its' requirement to train 'managers of violence', while shifting the focus of training towards a more diverse and emotively functioning position that sees the military transition into a new world along with its recruits. In addition to this, further research into the impact of early or unanticipated discharge on identity formation for those in the emerging adulthood stages of development is advocated for. Such research could increase what is known about how influential identity is to the functional processes that surround the military to civilian transition.

The findings highlight how difficult family perspectives are to grasp when approaching the research from a biographical approach. While the thesis has presented new insights into military transitions, there is much to explore around how pre-enlistment family experiences influence military service and how families can support desistance in the veteran population. As this research had originally intended to include the voices of family members, any research aiming to include the narratives of family members should be aware of the challenges to recruitment that arose from the stigma of help seeking for families of justice involved veterans. Additionally, this type of research will potentially include narrations of the veterans' difficult histories, but it may also include the difficult life histories of their family members. Therefore, extended recruitment strategies, and the provision of additional supervision or mental health support for the researcher is recommended as a means to ensure the difficult life histories being explored do not influence the research process. A final consideration for future research in this area includes the exploration of non-military sources of support for family members of justice involved veterans, as a means to understand how support is perceived and accessed.

The way in which this study was conducted is considered a contribution to the field itself. Although the challenges of the research have been noted through, the findings illustrate how much can be learned from an interdisciplinary approach. Further, the benefits of utilising an interdisciplinary approach are illustrated in the multitude of

golden threads that were highlighted by stepping outside of a singular discipline. To look at self-esteem and not belonging, or adversity and not views on masculinity would have been a disservice. In the same way, looking at transitions and not developmental life stages, or identity and not hopelessness could have allowed for such meaningful findings to be eluded. That is not to say that the included disciplines, subjects or theories speak to the whole truth of possibilities that exist amongst the data, but to simply say, that without an interdisciplinary approach, much of the context of the participants life histories may have gone unexplored. There is much that can be learned when addressing the needs of the veteran population from a macro view that narrows inwards once a pathway to understanding their lived experiences is uncovered.

Further, this study has added to the discourse around the cycles of victimhood that can occur when perpetrators report being victims themselves. While the participants have agency and a responsibility to be accountable for their crimes, ponderings of injustice and justice arose several times throughout this research study. As such, I have questioned whether the presentation of findings and the discussion that followed highlighted the injustice of the participants' lives or in anyway, rationalised the injustices that their victims incurred. Equally, I have questioned whether my experiences of military culture have impeded on my views of the military's level of responsibility in the life histories of the participants. I cannot provide a response to these ponderings with certainty. Balancing the participants' experiences, with my own, while conducting this research has provided a space to explore issues of trustworthiness, the notion of authenticity, and the importance of self-protection, for myself as a researcher and for the participants who cannot escape their life histories. Within the context of this thesis, the research questions were answered. Through a unique perspective, new understandings about the barriers to help seeking were uncovered and further insights into the relationship between adverse childhood experiences, military service at a young age and vulnerabilities to offending arose. Further contributing to what is known about the needs of incarcerated veterans. However, as anticipated, while some questions were answered, many remain.

In the end, my lived experiences, both personal and professional, have contributed to my interest in supporting justice involved veterans through this research study. The findings of this study are unique and exceptional. They are a co-construction of the lives of the participants and myself, which I am eternally grateful for. Equally, I

am mindful of rare it is that researchers get the opportunity to engage in research with serious offenders. Therefore, a final recommendation of this study is to encourage and facilitate more research that includes the voices of veterans who have committed acts of serious offending with a greater urgency than is presented in the current research landscape. As researchers and practitioners working with the armed forces, we must help to put an end to the unresolved battles of those who commit their lives to Queen and Country.

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APPENDIX ONE: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE RANGE
SEXUAL OFFENSE: 31-39

MAINSTREAM: 23-35

PRE-ENLISTMENT YOUTH OFFENDING

	REPORTED FORMAL CJS INVOLVEMENT	REPORTED 'TROUBLES'
Value 1	0	10
Value 2	2	5

JOINED AS A BOY SOLDIER
4/5
8/10

UNDER 5 YEARS OF SERVICE
3/5
3/10

TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT

*INELIGIBLE FOR MOD TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT	RECEIVED MOD TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT	DID NOT RECEIVE MOD TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT
4	1	5 / 5
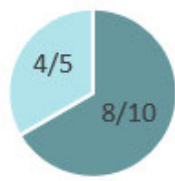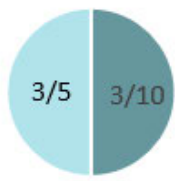
*Due to direct transition into prison

REPORTED ACE'S
4/5
10/10
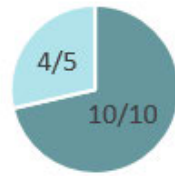
REPORTED ACE'S RELATED TO MATERNAL RELATIONSHIPS
1/5
5/10
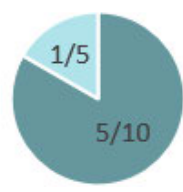
FAMILY SUPPORT
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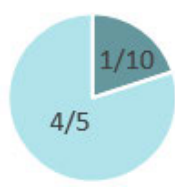
APPENDIX TWO: SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE ETHICAL APPROVAL

From: ████████████████████████████

Sent: 21 February 2018 15:42

To: Rappoport, Jacqueline

Cc: ████████████████████████████

Subject: RE: Ethics application

Jacqueline

The Research Access and Ethics Committee met last week to consider your proposal and was content to approve access in principle at this juncture. RAEC awaits comment from Nigel Ironside, the Governor with the operational lead for military veterans.

RAEC applied a few conditions:

• No access to young people or women because of current research saturation of those sub-populations;

• It should be feasible to draw sufficient numbers from a single location, so a reduction in the number of prisons sites to one (possibly two if absolutely necessary) to simplify organisational logistics and resource demands;

• If the families are required to be separate and unrelated to the military veterans interviewed in prison, it may necessary for you to seek the assistance of veterans agencies in the community to recruit suitable participants.

I will get back to you with further clearance and details on agreed location and VICSO contact in due course.

Regards

████████████████████████████

APPENDIX THREE: VETERAN RECRUITMENT FLYER

Recruitment Flyer used in recruitment: Veteran

Call for Research Participants!

Are you a Veteran, either male or female, with experiences of the criminal justice system and willing to talk to me about your experiences?

What are your experiences of the military and the criminal justice system?

What would you like professionals to know about your transition?

What support systems did you use when transitioning from military to civilian life?

What do you think contributed to your offending history since leaving the military?

What will the interview be like?

- The initial contact will ask you a series of questions about your suitability.
- The interview will take an hour to an hour and a half, giving you the opportunity to talk in greater depth about your views and experiences

of transitioning from military to civilian life as the family member of a veteran.

- The interview will be recorded so that we can be sure that we correctly remember everything that you tell us.
- I will come to a location you identify, at a time that suits you. There will be no costs to you

What will happen to the information I give?

- All of your information will be completely confidential and will be anonymised.
- The information will then be analysed and put together in a research document for professionals to gain insight into the experiences of veterans and their families

How will we arrange the interview?

If you express interest, I will conduct a phone or email questionnaire and then arrange for a face to face interview

Contact the researcher to get more information:

Ms. Jacqueline Rappoport

Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Institution: Edinburgh Napier University

Our responsibilities to you:

- **I guard your privacy:** research purposes only. Individuals will not be identified in the final report.

- **I respect your wishes:** participation in the study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, just let the me know when they contact you.

- **I answer your questions:** I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

APPENDIX FOUR: VETERAN INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Veterans Initial Screening Questionnaire

Screening Questionnaire to be conducted via email, telephone or face to face:

Hello,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study around the lived experience of veterans and their families during the transition from military to civilian life. Everything in this form will be confidential. If you have any questions about what that means, please do not hesitate to contact me. All information given will be used to gauge suitability for the study and will not be shared with the family member designated or any third parties.

Below are screening questions to be completed by the Veteran:

1. What is your name?

2. Are you Male or Female?

3. What is your age?

4. Are you from the UK?

5. How long did you serve?

    -
        a. What branch of service?

        b. How long did you serve?

6. How long ago did you leave the service?

7. Are you comfortable with my referring to you as a veteran?

8. If not, how would you feel comfortable to my referring to your time in the service?
    -
        *** I ask this question out of consideration for your time in the service, it is not necessary to answer and we can discuss this further at the interview stage if you like.

9. Did you leave the service by choice?

   •

   ***If you are not comfortable discussing your discharge, that is ok. Again, these questions are a chance for me to a get full picture of your time in the service.

10. Are you currently experiencing serious drug and alcohol or mental health challenges?

11. Are you comfortable discussing your offending behaviour since leaving the military?

   •

12. If yes, did your trouble begin before or after joining the military?

13. Do you have any further questions regarding the study? I will address these via email or telephone via the information you provide below.

The next stage will involve the main interview commencing. All the interviews will be held at a local library or community centre room in a safe and private area. The interview will take place at your convenience and will take 1.5-2 hours and will be taped with your consent. Again, this is recording will be confidential. If you require available resources at this stage, please indicate below and they will be given to you at the interview stage, via email or via the post.

Are you willing to continue to the next stage?

YES   NO

Name:

Contact Phone:

Email:

Best way/time to contact:

Resources Requested: YES   NO

Location for Resources:

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
Jacqueline Rappoport
Researcher
University of Edinburgh Napier
Contact: ███████████████████████████

APPENDIX FIVE: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

<u>Edinburgh Napier University Research Consent Form</u>

Revealing the contours of the military to civilian transition for veterans with experiences of the criminal justice system and the lived experiences of their families

Edinburgh Napier University requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and sign it if you agree with what it says.

- ☐ I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in the above research project.

- ☐ The broad goal of this research study is to explore <u>how veterans experience the challenges of transitioning from military to civilian life and the experiences of their families.</u>

- ☐ The interviews will be held face to face and will be recorded. <u>This information will not be shared.</u>

- ☐ <u>I have read the information sheet and understand what I am being asked to do.</u>

- ☐ I have been told that my responses will be anonymised. Meaning my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any report subsequently produced by the researcher.

- ☐ I also understand that if at any time during the <u>interviews,</u> I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to leave.

- ☐ I am able to withdraw my participation within two weeks of my final interview.

- ☐ After this time, it will not be possible for my data to be removed as it would be untraceable at this point.

- ☐ Should I wish not to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

- ☐ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the <u>interview process</u> and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

- ☐ I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. My signature is not a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to keep a copy of the informed consent form for my records if I request one

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the respondent has consented to participate. Furthermore, I will retain one copy of the informed consent form for my records.

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX SIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Veteran Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Included:
    (1) the opening; (2) the body; (3) the closing

Considerations:

Due to the limited sociological research interviews conducted, a moderately scheduled interview schedule has been developed. Not all of the questions will be relevant to each participant and it will be up to the researcher to amend the questions when necessary. Additional questions may be brought up depending on the direction of the interview and this risk will have to be factored in if necessary.

I. Opening

A. Introduction
Hello. My name is Jack.. As we discussed, I am the researcher looking into the experiences of veterans and their families. I worked as a qualified therapist from 2002 until starting this study in 2016. If at any time, you feel you need a break or uncomfortable talking about a subject, please let me know and we can address it. Just to inform you, everything we discuss today will be confidential, unless I am concerned about yourself or someone else. At that point, I will talk to you about my concerns and we can take it from there. I will not share the information with your family, or anyone else outside of the research project. Confidentiality is taken very seriously and if you would like me to go into greater depth, please let me know.

B. Motivation
As we discussed in the initial interview, I am looking into the experiences of veterans who have experiences with the criminal justice system since leaving the military. This could vary in reasons for offending and the type of offending behaviour. There are no judgements within this interview, I am looking to understand your experiences.

C. Adjusting to interview
In the beginning, I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your family, some experiences you have had, and some of your hobbies and interests in order to learn more about you. Please feel free to pass on any question as we go along. This is a journey we are going on together.

D. Time Line
The interview should take about one hour and thirty minutes. Our time is somewhat flexible and we can take breaks as you need them.
-Transition: Let me begin by asking you some questions about where you live and how long you have been out of the service?

 II Body

A. General demographic information not in the initial questionnaire

1. What was your experience of joining? Can you describe it for me?
2. Can you relate your experience in the military with what you are doing now?
3. Have you held many jobs since leaving the military?
4. What are you experiences with the criminal justice system? Can you describe it?
5. Do you feel your experiences of the military is linked with your offending behaviour?
6. Do you think there is anything else pertinent to the bio information that I have not covered?

B. Your view on your Transition

1. How would you describe your experiences once you 'pressed the button'?
2. What have your experiences been transitioning from military to civilian life?
3. Has your view contributed to your current situation in your opinion?
4. Do you think others can relate to how you view your transition?
5. Do you think you were prepared for your transition?
6. How do you feel about your transition period? Was it easy/ complicated/well informed?
7. How would you describe your civilian life?
8. What factors do you believe have enabled you to have the life you do as a civilian?

C. The Family

1. Are you married? Separated? Divorced? Never married? Cohabitating?
2. Do you have children?
3. If yes, do they live with you? If no, do you have contact?
4. Please describe your relationship with your family?
5. How would you describe the relationship while you were in the military?
6. Is it the same now?
7. Would they agree with your view on your transition?
8. Would you say your relationship with them has been positive since the transition to civilian life?
9. Do you think they were prepared for the transition to civilian life?
10. Did they contribute to the process positive/negative?
11. If relevant, How do they cope as civilians?
12. Do you think your views and how you are doing contribute to how they are coping?
13. Do you think it would affect your view on your transition if they thought differently than you about it?

D. The Support Systems

1. What do you think was the priority during the transition period?
2. What helped you target this?
   A. Tell me more about what you were hoping would happen/what you needed to happen.
3. Was there anything specific you thought would have changed your transition had they/it was not available?
4. Do you think other veterans can relate to this? Have you discussed the transition of other veterans in your circle if you have one ?
5. What would you say needs to be addressed with more haste by the military?

6. What are you willing to share about your experiences with policy advisors, the government or organisations supporting veterans and their families that could support a more positive transition for others?

E: End Statement

If you like I can briefly summarise the information that I have recorded during our interview.

III Closing:
Over the time of the interview, we have talked about a great deal. I really appreciate all the time you have taken in participating in this study. The next steps involve me interviewing other participants, spending time looking for commonalities and themes and connecting what I have found with other research to determine whether or not it matches up with other theories and policy guidelines in place for veterans and their families. It can be a complicated process and therefore, any findings won't be available for some time. I want to assure you again that all of our conversations are confidential and every participant will be anonymized for the study. Again, that means that no one will know that it is you I am writing about. If you would like a transcript of our conversations at any point, please feel free to ask but keep in mind, transcription itself is a long process and this may take some time to get back to you. Only you will be sent a copy. We will have a welfare check in a month if that is still ok with you and if at that time, you can think of any resources or support you may need, you can ask me then. I would like to check to see if there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know?

APPENDIX SEVEN: EXCERPT FROM AN PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW WITH PHASE 3/ STAGE 2 AND 4

Exploratory Comments Code: Black= Descriptive comments, Blue= Linguistic comments and Red= Conceptual comments. The interviewers' voice is *italicised* for clarity

Emergent Themes/ subthemes	Time	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Overly masculine views	00:38:54	I'm all for equal rights, right, I'm all for women and men being equal however a woman couldn't box a man.	Wants to appear as though we are the same, or equal. Wanting to encourage me to accept that we have the same views. That we can relate?
Negative views of women			Brings boxing in as a means to remind me that he engaged in fighting while in and violence since leaving?
Positive views towards violence	00:38:56	*Oh?*	I sound as though I am uncomfortable but potentially also could have been frustrated with the way he was speaking in terms of his tone and demeanour?
Employment			
Negative views of women in the military	00:38:57	No, but this is what I mean and equal rights and the feminist movement's ridiculous. Feminazis man,	Feminazis- shows an overtly negative view towards women and the movement towards gender equality

Defiance against perceived social norms Risk to employment Gender and pay considerations *Views women as other*		feminazis. I believe in equal pay for equal jobs and stuff like that but I don't believe in women serving on the front line of the military, that's me and not you.	Equal pay- did he feel as though women in the military put his job at risk? Equal jobs- Is that why he offended against his colleague? Because she was in the military? I don't believe in women serving- because then his role as a man is challenged? He is then given less opportunities in life? That's me and not you - Individual representation of views that could be viewed as 'against the norm'
	00:39:14	*I mean is there a reason?*	I am not sure where I was going with this question, I sounded interesting but also apprehensive. Am I uncomfortable? Scared?
	00:39:15	Yeah. Of course there was a reason, so my friend who I'm serving with will get shot as a	Friends- as a means to highlight the presence of social bonds or previous experiences of belonging?

| | | man, I can deal with that, but seeing a woman dying on the battlefield, it has different connotations because it does affect you differently psychologically | Deal with?- shows a lack of empathy towards violence

Seeing a woman die on the battle field die affects you psychologically - Misogyny under the guise of protection for women |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Social bonds* | | | |
| *Combat experiences and expectations* | 00:39:32 | *Why?* | |
| | 00:39:35 | Because it does. | |
| Psychological impact of combat | 00:39:36 | *But if they are willing to die in combat, just as you are, what is the difference?* | Missed opportunity to talk psychological implications

Potentially deflecting away and responding with short answers as a means to avoid further questioning. Potentially felt annoyed that I was 'challenging' his views? |
| | 00:39:48 | It's not about that, it's the way that is perceived by a male, to see your friend being shot, you can accept, but to see a woman who's your friend being | |

		shot is totally different, it's…	Why did I not allow more space and time for this? Why did I respond ironically combatively?
			Was I unsafe? How long had the guard been out of view?
	00:39:55	*But there are women serving in all sorts of spaces now, including the marines.*	Perceived by a male- views women as *other* Different – as a way to highlight the ways in which he views it 'normal' to separate people by genders
	00:39:58	Yeah, I don't agree with that	Did these views contribute to his offence as his colleague was former military? Was his acts against her a way to retaliate against her serving? Was she a threat to his job in the military? To his family? To the things he perceives as *his?*
	00:40:05	It's not we're not equal, it's just in the genetics, yeah.	
	00:45:02	*So if you got a flyer that came through your door that said, "Do you*	Why Jack, why? Where was I going with this? Was I trying to get him to have some amazing epiphany about

Biology		*need help? Contact us." would you…?*	why women should be in the military? Why did I care?
Help seeking	00:46:01	No, if it was worded in a different way that didn't come across as a weakness then yes.	Noted in this moment was his silence for the first time, here is where I felt my power came into play. Was he trying to make sure I still *liked* him? Equal and genetics- Using the biological argument to rationalise his view points, was this a means to protect himself or me potentially by moving the conversation along?
Families	00:46:07	*So, it's about weakness?*	
	00:46:10	Of course it is	Was I aware of the time? Did I feel unsafe? Why did I move this along?
Weakness	00:48:00	*What about? (question interrupted)*	
Vulnerability	00:48:02	I'm a man, not a- I mean since I got found guilty on Friday, I've not shed a tear, I've not been upset about it, I'm upset more about the connotations for my children, that's what got me more.	Weakness- masculine views as a barrier to help seeking
Masculine views of self			The sentiment that of course it is felt as though I should know that all men avoid being seen as weak was felt here
Children			Man- Help seeking relates to gender
Remorse?			Overtly masculine views as a barrier to help seeking

Families			Not shed a tear- emotions are related to gender and masculine identities, to show emotions is to be *weak*
Apprehension to engage in help seeking			Connotations for my Children- The first time he has mentioned his children outside of saying that he had them, why now? To show he has empathy for his offences or has empathy for how they will have to live with his offending history?
			Got me more- a sense of regret, or remorse? But not for the victims, for those he views as *his?*
	00:50:00	*If the flyer said, "Would you like help, a support for your family, would you?"*	Missed the opportunity to explore more the comments about family, weakness and sentiments around remorse
	00:50:05		
		That would be more likely	Likely- Showing a willingness to engage in help seeking if it is not about his personal identity?
	00:50:15		

		Okay	I blatantly wanted to get through the questions at this point and can tell by my quick response and how quickly I moved onto the next question

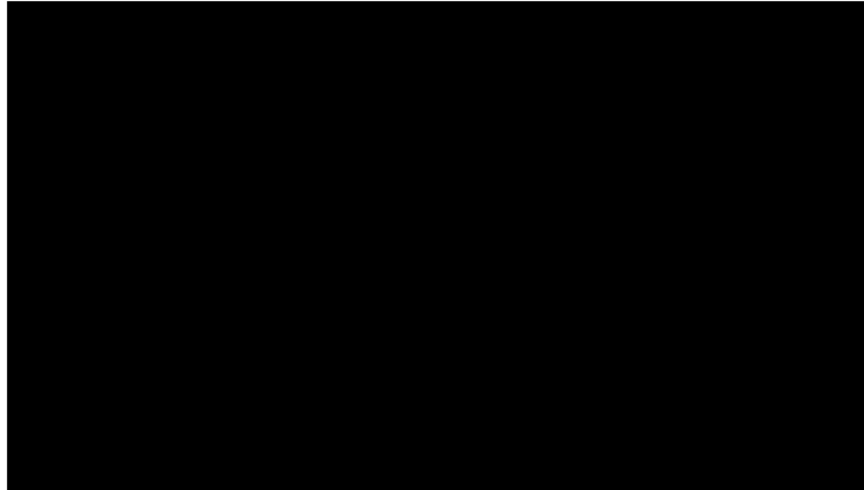# APPENDIX EIGHT: EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH HANDWRITTEN CODES, PHASE 1/ STAGE 2

APPENDIX NINE: IMAGE OF PHASE 2 OF ANALYSIS /STAGE 3
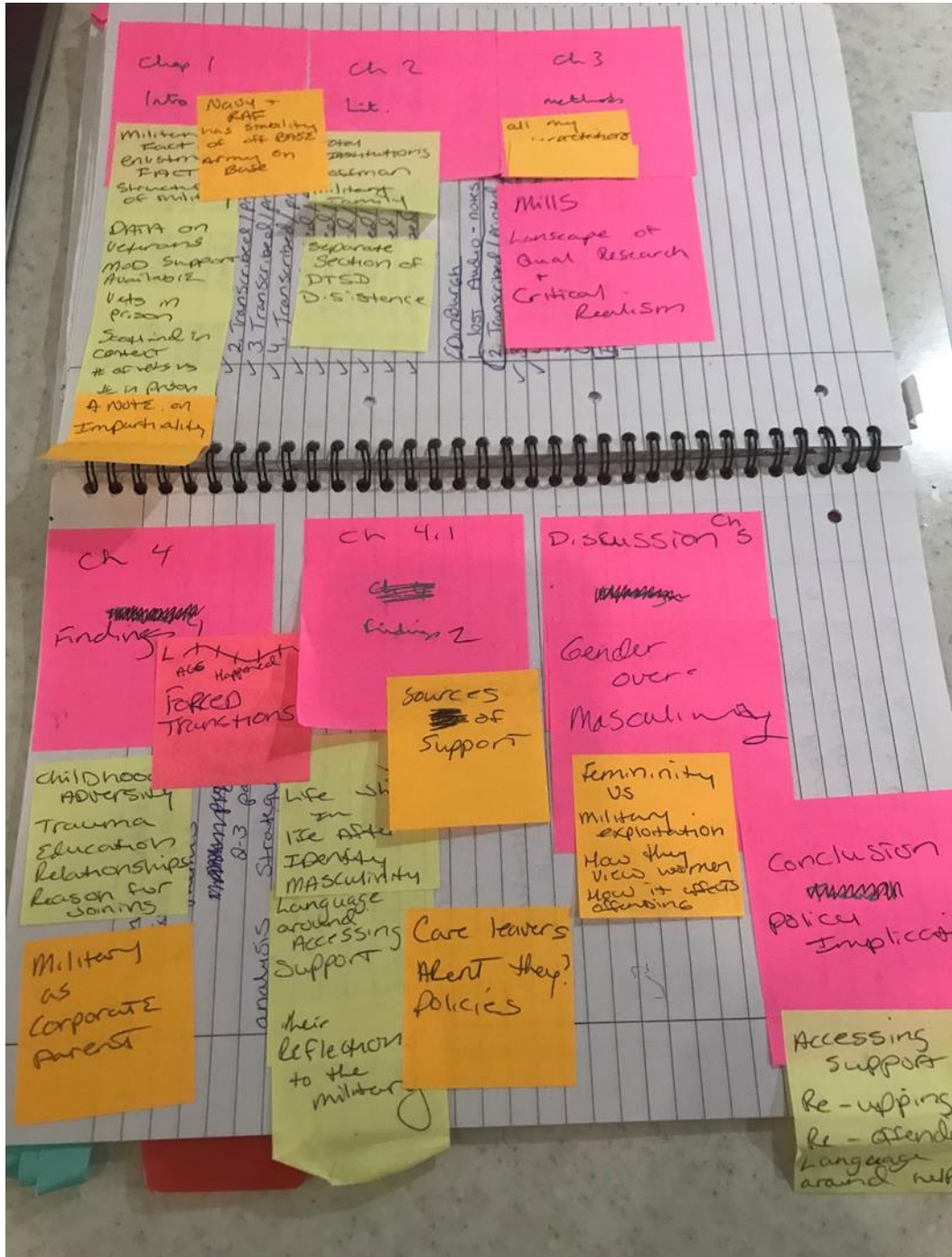
APPENDIX TEN: THEMATIC MAP OF PHASE 4/ STAGE 6 (FINDINGS 2 AND 3)

Fragile Futures

Negative Views of Desistance

Hopelessness   Shame   Social Isolation

Psychic Wound Unhealed

Unresolved Traumas

Poor mental Health   Emotional Disregulation   Maternal Abandonment

Grin and Bear it

Military Masculinity

Lack of help seeking   Loss of military identity   social isolation
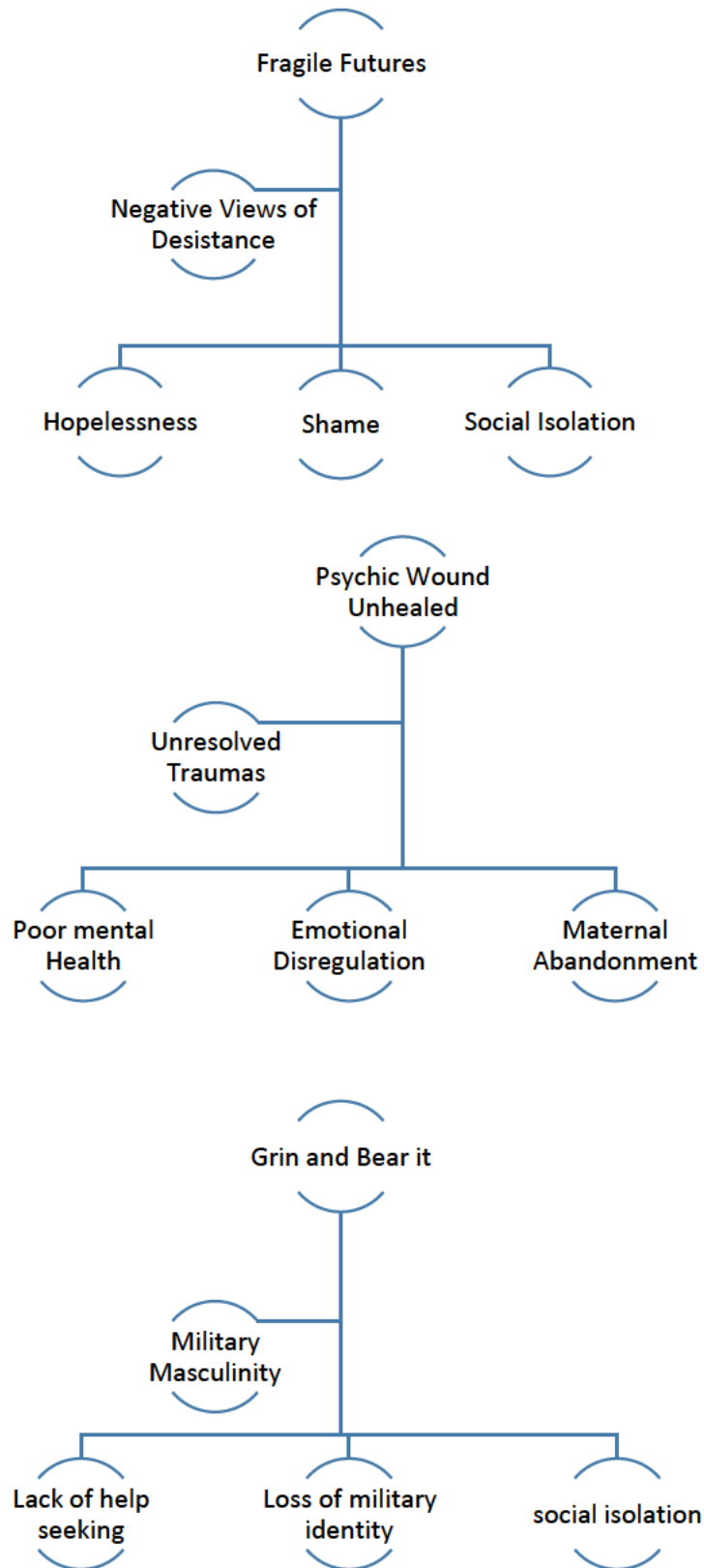
APPENDIX ELEVEN: VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

An image of a soldier with a flyer stating 'Talk to Someone'
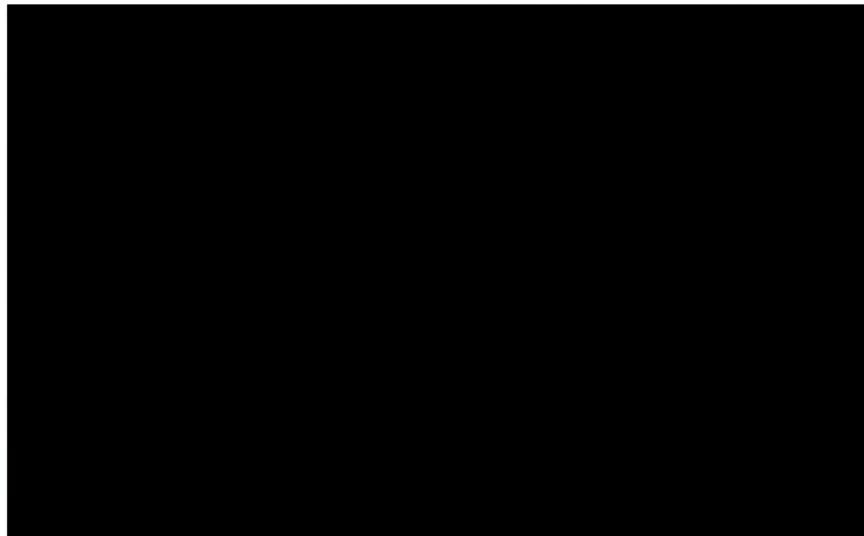
A revised image of a soldier with a flyer removing the personal nature of help seeking

APPENDIX TWELVE: VETERAN RECRUITMENT FLYER-AMENDED

Amended Recruitment Flyer: Veteran aimed

> *Have you served 1 day in the UK military? Are you willing to talk to me about your experiences to help make a difference for others?*

Have you ever been involved with the criminal justice system?

If so, your voice is needed!

Do you think people working with individuals in the military could do things better or different?

If so, I want to know your views !

What will the interview be like?
- I will ask you a few questions about your background. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.
  - The interview will 1-1.5 hours
- The interview is private and your information is not shared with anyone without your permission.

What will happen to the information I give?

- After the interview, my job is to put together everyone's experiences and see where professionals working with veterans can do a better job at supporting individuals like you.

- **How does the interview work?**

- If you are ok to take part, I will arrange a time with the VICSO that works for you. I cannot pay you but everyone is offered a support pack during the interview that can be sent to you or your family.

- Contact the researcher to get more information:
  Ms. Jack Rappoport
  - Email: [REDACTED]
    - Edinburgh Napier University

My promise to you:
- **I guard your privacy:** everything you share is private and later on is made anonymous

- **I respect your wishes:** You do not have to take part or can stop the interview at any time

- **I answer your questions:** I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.