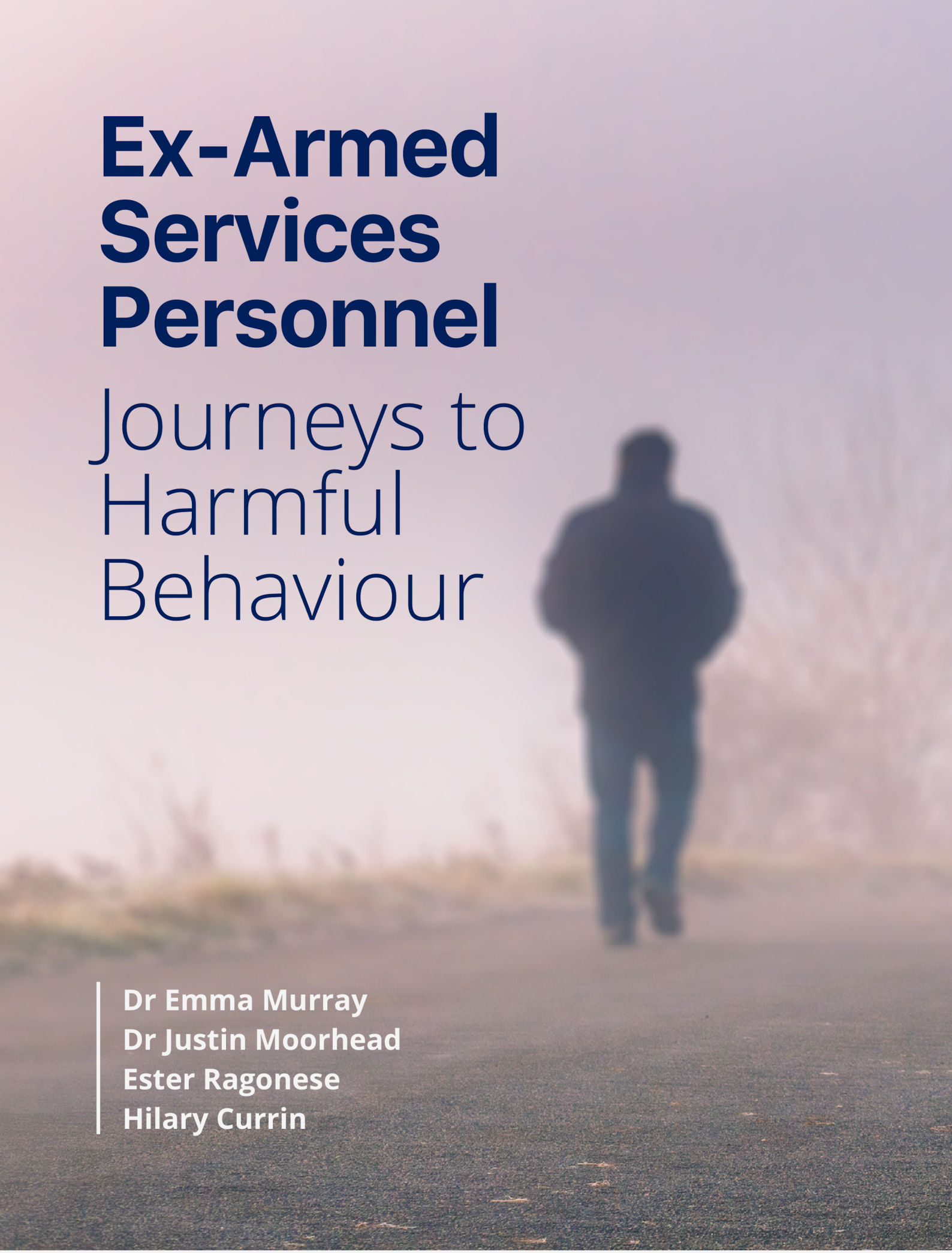
Ex-Armed Services Personnel

Journeys to Harmful Behaviour



Dr Emma Murray
Dr Justin Moorhead
Ester Ragonese
Hilary Currin

Probation Institute
LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
FiMT forces in mind trust
COMMUNITY FUND

“

I haven‘t got a lot of happy memories

Foreword

The completion of this research project is a tribute to the highly professional research team at Liverpool John Moores University – our partners in the project – who have completed this very sensitive programme of interviews and analysis through the constraints of Covid-19. We are grateful to individuals in the Prison Service and the Probation Service for facilitating research interviews both virtual and actual, always within the rules, but nonetheless at some very challenging times. The Forces in Mind Trust, our funders, have been immensely patient and supportive throughout. Our Advisory Board have consistently helped and encouraged us.

It was clear from the first interviews that this research was long overdue, necessary and potentially an important contribution to the future health of our armed services.

In the four years since we began, attention has been drawn by others to victims and survivors of domestic abuse within armed services communities; shining a light on gender, and on the potential for violent behaviour among veterans and those still serving. This should not wholly surprise us. The purpose of our research project has been to pay attention to the individuals within the military community who have committed offences of serious harm to others, either whilst serving or after leaving. The importance of this focus is in seeking to reduce the risks of further offences of serious harm by these individuals and others. The research seeks to understand the life histories of those interviewed in ways which can inform our understanding of the life histories of other young people who have adverse childhood experiences and go on to join the armed services.

We hope that the research report will be a flag – not only for the justice services, but critically for caring services in the public sector and for charitable organisations working with the veteran community. The justice agencies normally engage with high-risk individuals after serious harm to others has occurred. Important as this is, we can see that in some important respects, it is too late. In communicating our research findings we try to identify points at which appropriate interventions might in the future prevent harm to others.

There are messages in the research for government departments, justice and caring agencies, and for armed services charities. These messages are about:

- Better understanding of the risks presented by some individuals.
- Sharper focus on the information available at recruitment to armed services.
- A more keen awareness of the circumstances of early discharged individuals.
- Greater attention to fostering caring relationships throughout military service, and active support for individuals.
- Confidence in holding difficult conversations

We publish the research in what we hope is a compelling, but accessible form. We hope that it will generate discussions and action in the agencies mentioned above. The Probation Institute, Liverpool John Moores University and the Forces in Mind Trust are together keen to facilitate and inform such discussions. Finally, we are delighted that the Government Office for Veterans' Affairs Strategy Action Plan 2022 to 2024 specifically refers to the implementation of the findings of our report.

Helen Schofield

ACO, Probation Institute
March 2022

A welcome from FiMT

Forces in Mind Trust's mission is to enable ex-Service personnel and their families to make a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life. With respect to veterans and the law, our vision is for all ex-Service personnel to avoid any adverse contact with the Criminal Justice System, for Service leavers at risk of offending to be identified before leaving the Armed Forces and provided with the necessary support, and in the case that they do go on to offend, they receive appropriate, effective and timely support to prevent any re-offending.

We believe that no ex-Service personnel should be disadvantaged as a result of their service, and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most, such as those who have been injured or bereaved. In addition, any contributing factors which result in their engagement in criminal activity, particularly those related to their time in service, should be appropriately considered and support provided to both themselves and their families. We believe that more should be done to ensure that there is consistent data collection on the numbers of ex-Service personnel in the Criminal Justice System and that the data collection should cover all stages of the criminal justice process, thereby enabling policy makers and service providers to make informed decisions and provide support for any unmet needs.

We therefore welcome this important report and the trajectory anticipated for its implementation and congratulate the Probation Institute and report partners for their stoicism and determination in delivering it. The recommendations are significant and far reaching for central Government, the Ministry of Defence, the Criminal Justice System and wider society – we urge they be carefully considered by all those responsible for improving policy and support provision for vulnerable veterans, especially those in the prison and probation system.

Tom McBarnet
Chief Executive (Acting)
Forces in Mind Trust

About FiMT

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) was established in 2011 by a £35 million endowment from the Big Lottery Fund, now The National Lottery Community Fund. Our vision is for all ex-Service personnel and their families to lead fulfilled civilian lives. Our mission is to enable successful sustainable transition. We deliver our mission by commissioning and funding evidence generation to influence policy makers and service providers, and by improving the capability of the Armed Forces charities sector.

www.fim-trust.org

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Acknowledgments

In spite of the restrictions imposed by Covid-19, there have been so many people who helped us complete this project. Our sincere thanks go out to you all. Because of your collective commitment to the aims of this study, we are able to present this report.

Without the veterans involved, such research would not be possible. We greatly appreciate their honesty and openness in sharing their life stories with us. As a result of their participation, we have gained insights into the lives of veterans who commit serious offences. Their willingness to share their experiences has also enabled us to better understand how to support veterans in the future.

We would like to thank Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) for funding this project and Robert Thorburn in particular for his ongoing support - especially during the pandemic.

Sincere thanks to Professor Shadd Maruna for serving as an academic consultant on this project. His input and perspective has been indispensable to what follows.

Thank you also to those who acted as gatekeepers for this study. We would like to recognise Marek Musiol (HMPPS), Steve Lowe (RFEA, Project Nova), and Chance Morgan (HMP Parc) for their tireless efforts in recruitment, and Carrie Rogers (HMPPS) for connecting us to VICSOs nationwide.

The advisory board for this project has been fundamental to its continued development. We have referred to you as an 'active' advisory board to go some way to recognise the amount of time and support invested in the project. To Dr Katherine Albertson (Sheffield Hallam University), Racheal Biggs (MoJ), Yasmin Jannowski-Doyle (SAFFA), Jasber Jittlar (MoJ), Steve Lowe, Marek Musiol, Andrew Neilson (The Howard League for Penal Reform),Professor James Treadwell (Staffordshire University) and Gary Williams (SAFFA), thank you - your contributions have been extremely valuable.

Corin Morgan Armstrong and everyone at HMP Parc also deserve thanks for making our visits so welcoming, and for accommodating research visits on site during this difficult time.

These things are often developed through conversations with colleagues. Thanks to Dr Helena Gosling and Dr Michelle McManus in particular for their insights and encouragement.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in our stakeholder events in September 2020 in London and December 2022 virtually. All of your ideas and reflections have influenced our work.

Thank you also to those who offered comments upon the first draft of this report. Rosie Goodwin's practitioner insights further highlighted the importance of this work.

To work with the Office of Veterans' Affairs during editing was crucial. Georgina Drysdale in particular offered so much during these final writing stages.

Last, but by no means least, thank you to Sean Patrick at Interactive Academia for his incredible and tireless work in designing this report and accompanying resources, and showcasing this research in such a powerful way.

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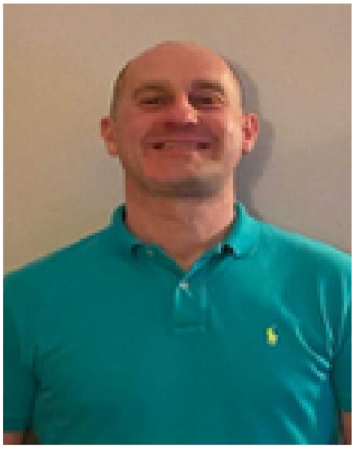

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01

Introduction

The study aims to learn more about the lives of those who have served in the military and committed serious crimes, including sexual offences.

By examining participants' life histories, insights can be gained into the factors that influenced their behaviour.

Among our findings are indicators that may reduce future serious harm-related offences.

Introduction

Aims of Study

One: Develop an understanding of the lives of participants before and during service as well as after, considering the impact of military service on participants lives and their offending histories.

Two: Consider the specific needs, risks and strengths of veterans who commit a serious offence - and their implications for future intervention.

Three: Engage practitioners in our emerging evidence base to better understand the specific needs of this group and inform prevention and justice sector policy and practice.

Overview

The Probation Institute (PI) has partnered with Liverpool John Moores University to conduct this qualitative study of ex-armed services personnel (ExSP, or veterans hereafter) who have been convicted of a serious violent offence or a sexual offence. Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) funded the study.

This study examines factors influencing the behaviour of veterans who commit serious offences against others over the course of their lives. Indicators from this study can be used to reduce the risk of serious harm to others. This information is valuable to practitioners. The report is intended to encourage discussion as to how veterans can best be supported.

Our participants were all men who had served in the UK Armed Forces. To be eligible to take part in the study, those men had also been convicted of serious sexual or violent crimes and in consequence had served time in the justice sector in England and Wales.

The findings cover their entire lives, which for some span 65 years. The earliest accounts of military service date back to the 1970s and the most recent ones date from 2019. During our analysis, we considered this factor, and we encourage you as readers and users to do so as well. Despite our belief that some military practices no longer exist today, they are vital for the justice sector to understand when working with veterans of that period.

In 2014 the Probation Institute researched provision for ex-armed services personnel in the justice system. We included data from the UK Defence Statistics (DASA, 2010) indicating that 99% of the ex-armed services personnel in the justice system were male. In view of the severe constraints on access to research subjects during the period of this project we did not seek research subjects of other genders.

Background to this Research Project

Each year, approximately 15,000 service members leave the armed forces. Although most veterans successfully transition into civilian life, there are a small number that become involved in the criminal justice system during their transition (DASA, 2010; Ford et. al., 2017; Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; British Legion, 2012; MacManus et. al., 2013; Murray, 2013; 2014; Phillips, 2014). Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons collected 190 reports identifying 6.07 percent of the male prison population as ex-military between 2012 and 2019.

A variety of factors contribute to veterans in custody (HMIP, 2014), including trauma experienced in early childhood, difficulties encountered during service (e.g., health problems) and challenges faced following service. Studies have found that veterans are not more likely to be convicted of a crime than civilians, but they are more likely to commit violent crime (MacManus et al. 2013; MacDonald 2014) or sexual crime (DASA 2010). There are significantly more veteran prisoners serving lengthy sentences for violent and sexual crimes. (Fossey et al, 2017; Kelly, 2014). Violence and sexual crime pose social, economic, and health challenges.

Due to prior research and awareness raising, veterans have become a distinct population for the justice sector.

The Veteran Strategy Action Plan

The Office for Veterans' Affairs published The Veterans' Strategy Action Plan 2022-2024 in January 2022 in response to the Strategy for our Veterans (2018). It outlines the policy commitments to support veterans through 2024. The plan identifies three areas of action:

1. Understanding our veteran community.
2. Transforming services and support for veterans.
3. Celebrating our veterans and their contribution to society.

The Strategy's ongoing commitments are outlined in Annex A.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) states that it intends to examine this research for additional insights into reducing risk under the theme of 'Veterans and the Law'.

In 2016, the PI and the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies conducted a report (also funded by FiMT) entitled Provision of Services for Ex-Armed Personnel Under Supervision. In the report, Ford et al. (2016) suggested that:

- Military service can both positively and negatively impact civilian adjustment.
- A focus of future research should be on clarifying the needs of veterans: this should shed light on, for example, the impact of transitions to civilian life that are dislocating and unfulfilled psychological needs that surface later in life.
- Rather than commission projects and then evaluate them, it is imperative to expand the knowledge base in order to inform future efforts based on an understanding of service needs and impact.

This study addresses all 3 points. With the intention of not only strengthening the response of practitioners where extremely serious crimes have been committed, but also to reduce the likelihood of ex-armed service personnel committing acts of violence or sexual abuse against a person in the first place.

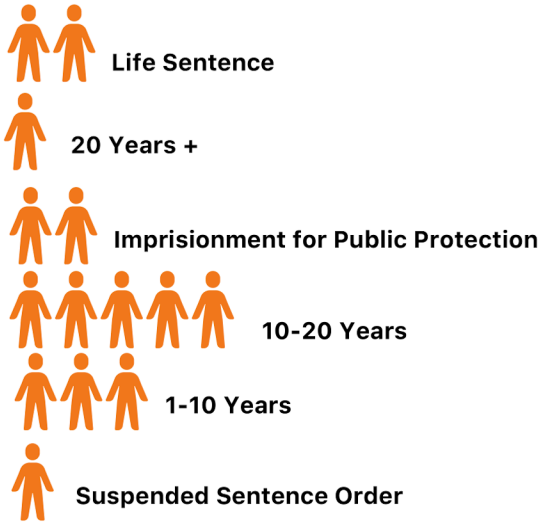
Characteristics of our sample

Offence type:

Serious violence (n.6) Sex offences (n.8).

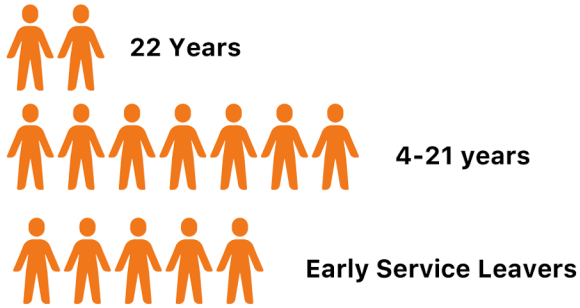
Sentences:

Life Sentence (n.2), 20 years + (n1) IPP (n.2), 10-20 years (n.5), 1-10 years (n.3), SSO (n.1).



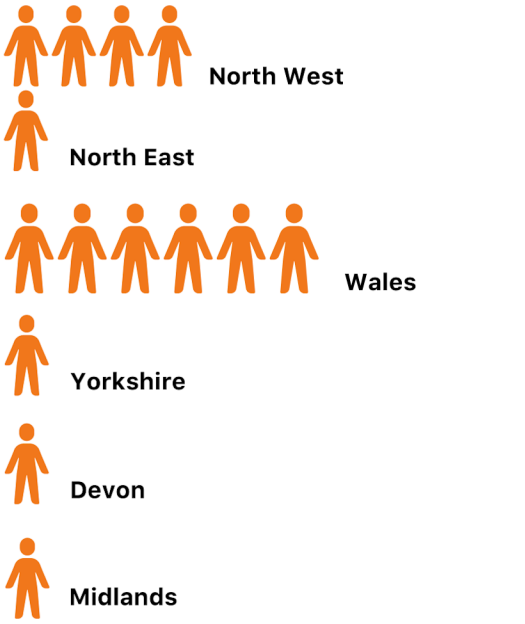
Military service length:

22 years (n.2), 4-21 years (n.7), Early Service Leavers (n.5).



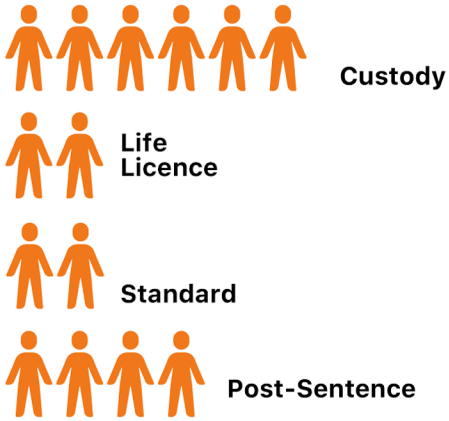
Location:

Northwest (n.4), Northeast (n.1), Midlands (n.1), Yorkshire (n.1), Wales (n.6), Devon (n.1).



Sentence stage:

Custody (n.6), Life Licence (n.2), Standard Licence (n.2), Post sentence (n.4).



Account of the impact of Covid-19 on the Research Project

Covid-19 and the subsequent restrictions imposed on the research staff and the research sites greatly slowed down the project. Between March 2020 and June 2021, all data collection activities were unavoidably halted or moved online.

Among our responses to Covid-19 were:

March 2020	Planned data collection activities cancelled due to the restrictions placed upon citizens and services by the Covid-19 National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services Guidance. Computer-based research continued.
Sept 2020	The research design was amended to include virtual data collection.
Oct 2020	Liverpool John Moores University Ethics Committee approves resubmission. In addition to moving to virtual data collection during ongoing restrictions, the submission considered participants who take part in research virtually when support services were not functioning normally.
Dec 2020	National Research Council (NRC) application to extend project end date and approve virtual data collection strategy. Covid-19 risk assessment meets NRC requirements.
Jan 2021	FiMT formally postponed the project following a further national lockdown.
July 2021	Project resumed.

02

Stakeholder Engagement

Knowledge exchange with key stakeholders was essential for advancing understanding and developing services at the same time. For this purpose, the research team engaged academics, policy makers and practitioners in a dialogue.

Two Knowledge Exchange events were held to engage stakeholders in both the design of the project and the findings.

Stakeholder Engagement

In this project, cross-sectoral dialogue and knowledge exchange have been important to:

1. Communicate research to stakeholders in a straightforward manner.
2. Discuss issues that are relevant to policy, practice and communities.
3. Encourage evidence-based policy making by stimulating debate.
4. Identify key areas for discussion that will enhance understanding.
5. Engage stakeholders in the formulation of dissemination strategies in order to influence change.

Event 1: September 2019, London.

Consultation on the implications of current policy and practice

The event was held prior to the collection of data so key stakeholders could discuss their experiences with this group and the challenges of current practices and policies. Researchers also shared their early ideas at the event. The report addresses the specific needs of service providers based on this discussion.

Representatives from 42 organisations attended the event, including armed forces charities, NHS providers of mental health care for veterans, Senior Probation Managers responsible for policy initiatives, probation practitioners, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), and the Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC), together with colleagues from the third sector and academics.

As a result we learned that:

- Veteran-specific organisations were eager to learn more about how they could assist veterans across the justice sector.
- Further training is required for all staff across the justice sector on the specific needs of veterans during sentence.
- Connected practice and networking opportunities were considered crucial for practitioner confidence.
- Research was difficult to use due to a lack of accessibility to reports and academic styles.

Event 2: December 2021, Virtual Platform

Consultation on the implications of the findings of this project

During a virtual knowledge exchange workshop, our key stakeholder groups were joined by Veterans in Custody Support Officers (VICSOs). The invitation was sent via HMPPS. We prompted 3 discussions based on the findings across life stages.

01

Topic: Understanding the life course when working with veterans

The group identified key points throughout participants' lives at which different interventions may have reduced the likelihood of future harm. Many transition points were identified. Included were transitions into and out of school, care arrangements, military recruitment and training, enlistment and different routes out of the military as well as transitions into and out of custody.

Outcome: Discussion 1 has helped to shape recommendations (1,2,4,6,7,9)

02

Topic: Understanding the challenges for policy and practice

The group identified reliance on third-sector and local organisations as a key challenge. Due to the lack of statutory involvement, services were fragmented and often lacked veteran-specific knowledge. Standardised identification processes were viewed as essential for the group from arrest to resettlement. There was a suggestion that access to support for sexual offenders was difficult due to military charities' reluctance to offer assistance.

Outcome: Discussion 2 has helped to shape recommendations (8 & 9)

03

Topic: Understanding our findings through an accessible and dynamic dissemination strategy

The group reiterated the need for straightforward and accessible research materials. Participants wanted to diversify the formats in which findings and recommendations are shared - including learning resources - rather than a lengthy academic report.

Outcome: Discussion 3 resulted in the development of several project resources, including;

- **A Timeline of key research findings**
- **A Poster of Key Findings**
- **Case study learning resources**

03

Methods

Veterans who have committed serious crimes, including sexual offences, need qualitative research to better understand them. Researchers interviewed 14 men over the course of two interviews as part of a case study approach. Some case managers have also been interviewed (n.7).

Transcripts have been analysed using three analytical sets to ensure maximum learning. This chapter outlines the data collection and analysis methodology.

Methods

Research Design

This study has adopted a case study design to collect information about n.14 veterans who meet our eligibility criteria and to share this information with stakeholders from the justice, veterans, welfare and health sectors.

By obtaining each life history in a narrative fashion, identities, cultures and experiences can be explored. Interviews focussed on points in participants' lives rather than criminalised behaviours, to get a narrative of their lives rather than just their criminal records.

Although the original intention of this project was to actively engage the families and/or significant others of participants, it was clear early on that this would not be possible. We encountered several barriers, including participants' reluctance to contact family and significant others, broken relationships and in some cases no contact at all. This is a significant finding, as it indicates that veterans who have committed crimes of this kind have fewer opportunities to maintain family relationships.

Research Intention and Objectives

It is the aim of this study to identify factors that influence the behaviour of former members of the armed forces who commit serious crimes of violence.

The following objectives guided the research:

- To identify, wherever possible, the factors that led to the commission of the serious offence.
- To examine factors that influence the choices and patterns of behaviour of individuals including education, employment, family history, military experience and alcohol and drug use.
- To gain a better understanding of the experience of multiple transitions in the life course - particularly military transitions.
- To learn more about each individual's needs and strengths by engaging in an in-depth qualitative process.
- To develop learning materials for practitioners.

Ethical Approvals

The National Research Council (NRC) granted ethical approval for this research project (Ref: 2019: 025), as well as the Liverpool John Moores Ethical Committee (UREC reference: 20/LCP/006). Covid-19 resulted in a resubmission to allow for the collection of virtual data and an extension of time. Both committees approved amendments.

Recruitment

The research team has close connections to service providers as well as strong national and regional connections. Service providers served as gatekeepers to veterans at various stages of participant sentences. With reference to the following selection criteria, gatekeepers supported recruitment. Participant eligibility was contingent upon an individual having;

a) served in the UK Armed Forces.
b) committed a violent or sexual crime;
c) served (or still serving) a custodial sentence;
d) a willingness to be interviewed twice.

Why qualitative research?

In order to fully understand the complex issues that affect this group of people, and therefore develop effective justice sector policies, there have been numerous recommendations for more qualitative research (Howard League, 2011; Murray, 2016; Treadwell, 2016; Ford et. al., 2016).

Through qualitative research, we gain insight into the nuances of lived experience. A narrative approach was utilized to interview participants, weaving experiences into the narratives and providing insight into how these experiences shape their self-identity and outlook on life. Through this, we can move from strict correlation to understanding the social psychology of violence.

Thus, small-sample studies of self-narratives are complementary to large-sample, quantitative studies of the risk factors associated with crime. Both types of research contribute to developing evidence-based best practices.

Narrative-based research can shed light on the subjectivity and lived experience of crime and resistance throughout a person's life, despite its limitations in generalisability. By using narrative research, researchers gain a better understanding of the world from the viewpoint of their participants. Studies like this should provide a basis for future analyses, discussions and research.

Life Course Interviews

The interviews took place between 2019 and 2021, in person, by telephone and via video conference while participants were in custody or in the community. Each participant was interviewed twice.

In the first interview, a life map was created. A life map illustrates key events or stages in the participant's life in a chronological order. During the first interview, we paid particular attention to the following points in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the lives of the participants:

- A participant's offending history (such as the prevalence of incidents and their beliefs about their own criminality).
- Transitions in the life course.
- How participants narrate causal mechanisms for behaviour across their life trajectory (i.e. major turning points).

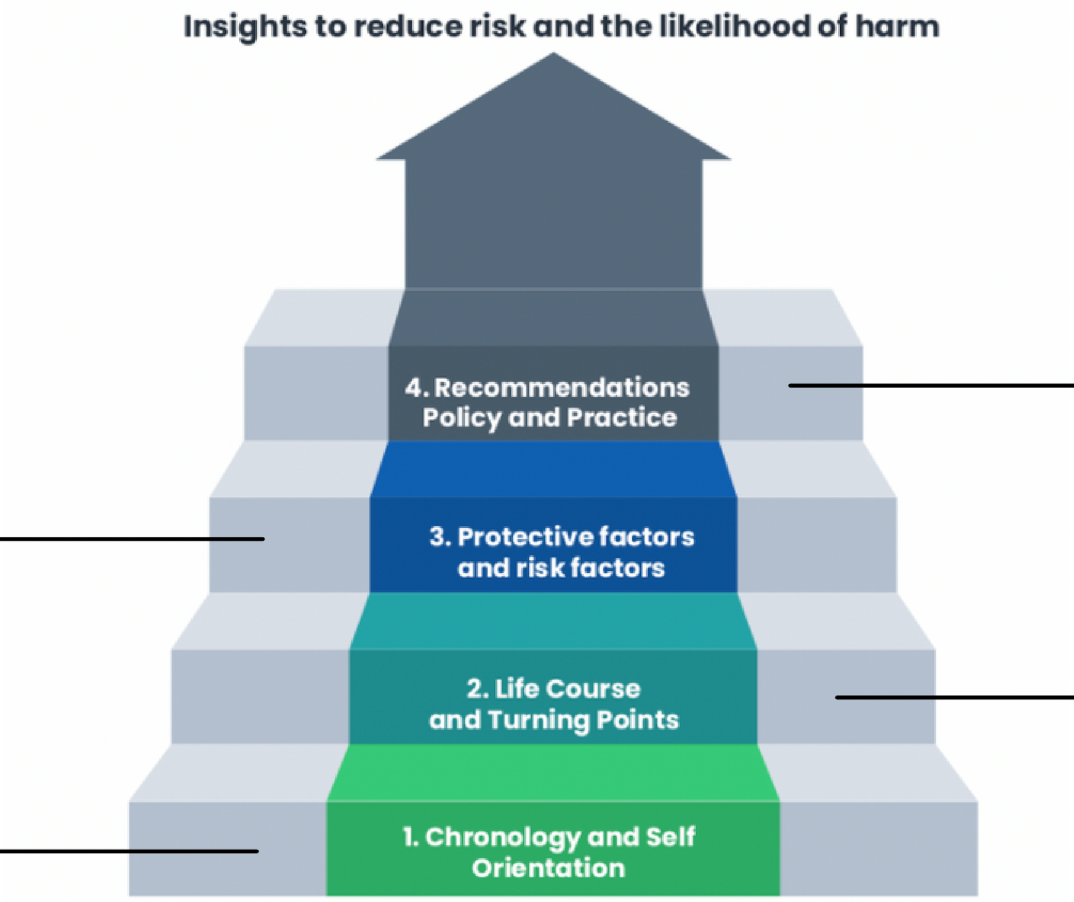
During the second interview, participants were asked about specific events in their lives so as to better understand risk factors, protective factors, rehabilitation and (where possible) resistance at various stages of their lives. It is crucial that more information about 'causal mechanisms' is gathered in this case. Participants' explanations of relationships and the attachment they have to them as well as their explanations of their decision-making around their identities, habits and behaviours are important in building a picture of 'hooks for change' (Giordano et al. 2002; Maruna 2001).

Analysis

During the course of the project, we conducted a thematic analysis that corresponded to the project aims. We conducted a total of three separate sets of analyses in order to maximize the learning potential of the data.

3. A third analysis of the data identified risks, protective factors and the needs and lessons to be learned by the health, welfare and justice sectors.

4. Finally, our data and indicative findings were shared with key stakeholders to inform recommendations.



1. The first analysis arranged transcripts chronologically before focussing upon participant identities - their beliefs, their ways of expressing themselves, their understanding of their offence and interventions in their lives.

2. In a second analysis, we investigated the points in the life-course where agency and choice are expressed. Specific attention was paid to 'turning points' and participant's understandings of key moments in the life course.

Practitioner Insights

Four types of insights were gained from practitioners.

1. In the first instance, the advisory group actively contributed insights.
2. In the second instance, stakeholder events were conducted.
3. A third step involved conducting semi-structured interviews with n.7 practitioners in order to better understand the challenges faced by veterans and the impact of current policy provisions.
4. Finally, commenting on the first draft of this report.

These insights can be found throughout this report in boxes like this one.

Key Findings Across the Life Course

Narratives of pre-military adversity

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).
- Broader childhood adversity is also a feature.
- Military used to escape and transform.

Narratives of military service

- The military provide protective factors.
- The risk of military service.
- Risk and protective factors conflated.

Narratives of transition

- Risk and protective factors are inversed and exacerbated.
- Experiences of exclusion and isolation.
- Dishonourable discharge is commonplace.

Narratives concerning the justice sector

- Veterans have specific needs.
- Risk is often misinformed and escalated.
- A need for a tailored approach.

Narratives towards change

- Trauma-informed practice with children.
- ACE aware practice for Ministry of Defence.
- Veteran-aware justice sector.

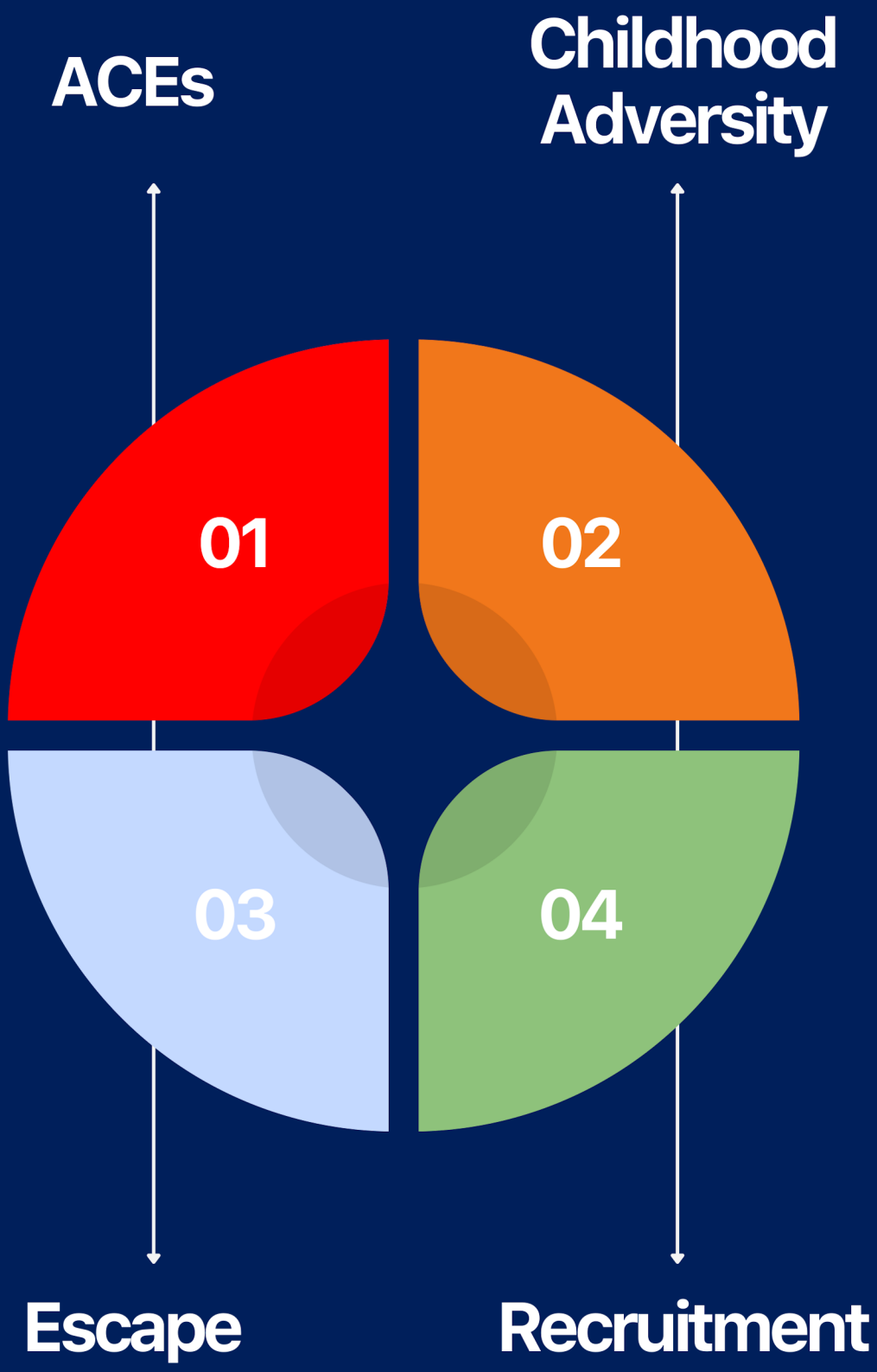
04

Pre-Military Adversity

The purpose of this chapter will be to explore the lives of participants prior to their enlistment in the armed forces. Participants had a high prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as well as broader adverse experiences before they enlisted.

Enlistment was, in the majority of cases, regarded as a means of escape as well as a means of personal transformation.

Key Themes



Think ACE-ACE

Adverse

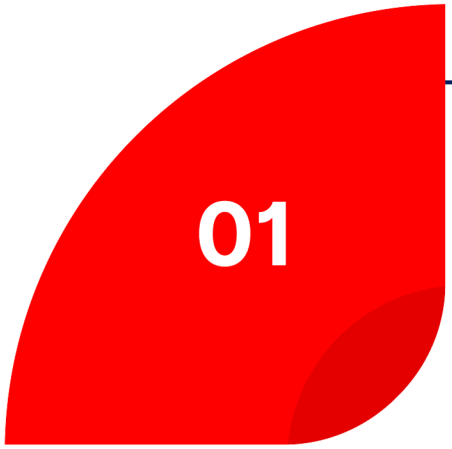
Childhood

Experiences

Actively

Correlates with

Enlistment



ACEs

- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Psychological Abuse
- Separation

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are "highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. They can be a single event, or prolonged threats to, and breaches of, the young person's safety, security, trust or bodily integrity." (Young Minds, 2018). Based upon Felitti, et. al., (1998) study, Asmussen et al (2020) suggest the following 10 ACEs:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- psychological abuse
- physical neglect
- psychological neglect
- witnessing domestic abuse
- having a close family member who misused drugs or alcohol
- having a close family member with mental health problems
- having a close family member who served time in prison
- parental separation or divorce on account of relationship breakdown

These experiences had a profound impact on health outcomes later in life, according to research. The physiological response to stress has been demonstrated. Trauma in children is not merely a result of what happens to them - it occurs in their brains and bodies as well.

Excessive cortisol exposure, or toxic stress, has long-term negative effects on the brain's ability to learn. Consequently, students who are victims of trauma are more likely to fail academically and often struggle in the classroom. Links between ACEs and subsequent anti-social behaviour, including commission of violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), Sexual IPV, sex offending, self-harm, substance misuse and mental health have been evidenced across a broad literature base (see inter alia; Fonsceca et. al., 2011; Gordan et. al., 2020).

Through the life course approach, participants were encouraged to freely describe their childhood memories in whatever way they wished. Without being specifically asked about adversity, almost all (n.12) participants began with stories that mapped onto at least one or more of the 10 ACEs (Felitti et, al., 1998). For many of our participants 4 or more were central. This finding is further evidence of the prevalence of ACEs prior to enlistment (see for instance, Katon et. al., 2015; Blosich et. al., 2014).

Our analysis revealed that 4 ACEs were most common in our sample; physical abuse, witnessing physical and psychological abuse, psychological abuse (of children within the immediate family unit), sexual abuse (of children by adult caregivers), and parental separation in the participant narratives.

Quotes from Participants: Adverse Childhood Experiences

Almost all participants (n. 12) described home as a place where they were not safe.

I come from, what might be described as a broken home, a dysfunctional home. Dad was an alcoholic, my mum was emotionally distant... home was not a good place to be.

- Veteran post-Sentence

Violence often happened at the hands of Dad or Step-Fathers:

He used to punish us... he used to whip me with the back of a fishing rod... he'd humiliate us... we'd stand in the corner of the living room with our hands on our head until he decided it was time for us to go to bed. If any of his friends came round, we had to go into the kitchen and do exactly the same, stay in the kitchen with our hands on our head. It was degrading, humiliating.

- Veteran on Probation

'I used to get the belt.... It was a regular occurrence. Sometimes my dad, he'd been arguing with me step-mum and he'd take it out on me and our kid and we'd get the belt for nothing.

- Veteran on Probation

Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse was also witnessed regularly:

He'd beat her and that. He was violent to my mum.

- Veteran on Probation

He was... verbally aggressive to my mum... just screaming and shouting, name calling and that sort of thing.

- Veteran in Custody

I used to hate my Mum for allowing him to treat her like that. We would be in bed listening to him beating her and I couldn't understand what kept us there. We would listen knowing that he might come for us next. I hated her for it. Hated him more.

- Veteran on Probation

02

Childhood Adversity

- Separation
- Exclusion
- Bullying

Childhood Adversity

It is increasingly acknowledged that experiences beyond those described by ACEs amount to childhood adversity. The term 'childhood adversity' refers to a broad range of experiences or situations that may threaten a child's physical or psychological wellbeing. Among childhood adversities are abuse and neglect, domestic violence, bullying, serious accidents or injuries, discrimination, extreme poverty, and community violence. Research demonstrates the serious impact of such experiences over time - especially if they take place in childhood, are chronic or severe, or if they are cumulative (Shonkoff and Garner 2012).

In the vast majority of cases, participant's earliest memories are associated with some form of exclusion, whether it was from school, family or from the economic system (n.12). Exclusion often results in some form of separation from family units and peer-groups on a physical and psychological level. In addition, participants mentioned that the death of a parent (n. 6) or parental figure (n.2), as well as feelings of abandonment or loss, affected their sense of self, as well as subsequent behaviours and decision making. It is noteworthy that several individuals (n.8) described some form of bullying towards them in their early childhood. For these men, joining the military was an opportunity to prove their worth or to become noticed and included.

Practitioner Insights

"You can guarantee that if we asked about their childhoods that they would tell you it wasn't good."

(Peer Mentor)

Quotes from Participants: Childhood Adversity

I was born, basically, in poverty, a working class family, and didn't have any money. Pretty much grew up on a council estate, all my mates were petty criminals really, growing up, juvenile crime, paint spraying, vandalism, drinking early, smoking weed early. I got bullied at school as well.

- Veteran on Probation

Participants also explained how they had been excluded from their families:

After my father died, I didn't really get on with my mum properly, because most of the time I didn't go to school properly, and it caused a lot of arguments... It was mainly bullying... I was imagining all sorts of things, I didn't want to die, I didn't want to leave my mum and I didn't want to go to school... Eventually, she got tired of me not going to school. I went into care... I absolutely hated it... I was getting bullied again... I would run away.

- Veteran on Probation

I was taken into Care a lot as a kid, my Mum couldn't cope with us all, I was the eldest so I had to go.

- Veteran on Probation

My step dad didn't really accept me as part of the family. My school[ing] went from me being two years ahead of everyone at school to me being either disruptive or absent. I was quite disruptive and unruly... my step brother and sister got everything.

- Veteran on Probation

Participants were almost always excluded from school:

I was truanting to get away from school and away from bullies and... my problems.

- Veteran on Probation

03

Escape and Transformation

- Physical Move
- Protection
- Change

Escape and Transformation

Participants viewed enlistment as a means of escape from:

- Adversity and dysfunction associated with family units.
- Conflict and violence in their physical environment.
- Bullying, isolation, and exclusion.
- Lack of security and economic hardship.
- Crime or criminal activity.

In a quest of self-transformation, enlistment offered an opportunity to become a part of a family and to seek security and safety as well as to increase their sense of worth or status. In addition to achieving employment within a highly regarded career, it was appealing to participants to build strengths and to develop new skills and knowledge.

Practitioner Insights

"These men have often left troubled backgrounds to join the military and in doing so they have escaped what might have been a life of crime in the first place. By joining the military, they leave all that behind and live a life they are proud of and others are proud of them."

(Justice Sector Practitioner)

Quotes from Participants: Escape and Transformation

Well, my friends were in trouble with gang related crime and violence and that, heroin, amphetamines, ecstasy and stuff like that. I just wanted to escape that really.

– Veteran on Probation

I wanted to make something of myself, something they would be proud of and something I would be proud of - I had always wanted that.

– Veteran on Probation

Well, it was just crime everywhere you looked... it was just everyone, cars on fire, fucking drugs everywhere, people fighting each other, you name it, it was there.

– Veteran on Probation

I was brought up in a criminal environment, you know, looking out for the police... it was the norm, people were selling drugs, people were robbing this and robbing that and it was just a way of life.

– Veteran on Probation

I just wanted to get away, travel, be somebody - I mean become somebody, you know, somebody good.

– Veteran on Probation

04

Recruitment

- Finding Acceptance
- Risk Seeking Rewarded
- Best Recruits & Re-traumatisation

Remembering Recruitment

Most of the participants were under the age of 18 at the time of their enlistment (n.12). Over half visited an Army recruitment office when they were 15 years old (n.8). As was mentioned in the previous section, recruitment offered a means to escape backgrounds, however these early life experiences remained important throughout the course of their military careers.

Drugs and violence were a regular part of the lives of our participants when they were younger. In that regard, we can learn a lot from previous studies. Studies that suggest that the Military prefers individuals with traits associated with sensation-seeking, fearlessness, impulsiveness and attraction to high-adrenaline situations are critical to understanding how and why these traits are rewarded during recruitment and beyond (Iversen et al., 2007)

Further, Galahad (2005 cited in Bradley et al 2021) found that there was a significant overlap between the psychological profiles of sensation seekers (risk seekers), drug users and soldiers. Ferguson et al. (2005) found that several of these personal traits (and coping strategies) are also associated with the ability to cope with adversity during childhood, as well as the likelihood of developing behavioural problems during childhood.

Practitioner Insights

"Those from the worst backgrounds make the best soldiers. All of the best had come from a bad place. They are the ones who have nothing to lose".

(Peer Mentor)

Quotes from Participants: Recruitment

I know what I would do with the army and I think I'd screen people better before they go and see what kind of background they're from, if they're from deprived areas, if they've had domestic violence in their lives, if there have been drug and alcohol problems within the family, various things like that. There may be flags and indicators, maybe some people are more vulnerable than others, even though you're all the same in training, you're all wearing that stupid jumpsuit and you're all jumping to the same tune, we're all different psychologically and we've all come from different backgrounds... The way you're treated can have different effects on different people. I think just from what I've thought, I think I could have been helped when I was younger as well, even earlier on in my training, just to say, we realise you're from a tough background, you've had a difficult time and you've got criminal mates and you were in a little bit of juvenile trouble, do you want to talk about it. If you've ever got any problems, we're here if you want to come and see us, there's that person, there's that lady there who is a counsellor and if you ever need to talk in confidence, stuff like that.

- Veteran in Custody

The military is an abusive life. They do seek to break you down and make you into something that can aim a gun and fire it at people. So, there is an element of coercion, control and bullying. All that's going on there is to remould people and because of what had been going on in my life, I think that it was just an extension of what I had already experienced, in a more controlled environment.

- Veteran on Probation

After three weeks I'd just been absolutely thrashed, physical and mentally. Locker inspections. At 2:00 in the morning you get a twelve-mile run over the hills of Edinburgh, it's like running up a wall. It was freezing cold. It was during winter. I didn't even have a top window where I was sleeping so the lads gave me extra blankets. It was rough but I got through it.

- Veteran on Probation

05

Narratives of Military Service

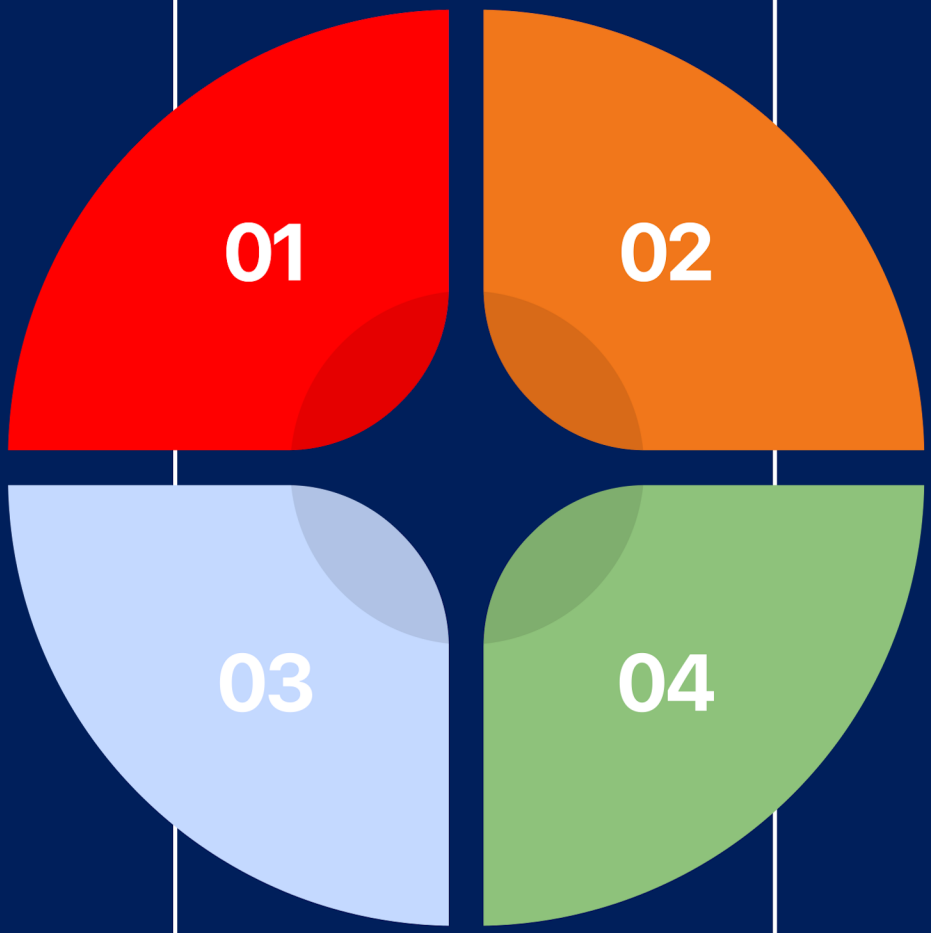
This chapter explains how participants described their time in the military. It is evident that the military provided many complex and varying protective factors for its members, and in particular, those who had experienced adversity in their past.

The military culture and experiences are also characterized by the presence of risk factors linked to violence and sexual activity. The loss of a comrade is one of the major traumas associated with deployments.

Key Themes

Protective Factors

Risk Factors



Deployment Trauma

Overlaying protections with risk

The 'BACK-SAFE' Acronym

Our analysis demonstrated that children from adverse experiences who enlist tended to be motivated by eight main factors highlighted by the acronym BACK-SAFE.

B rotherhood
A cceptance
C amaraderie
K inship

S tatus
A ccommodation
F amily Unit
E conomic Security

01

Protective Factors

- Brotherhood
- Inclusion
- Security

Protective Factors

On the basis of our study findings, we can make a strong argument that participants did find the protective factors they had hoped for when they enlisted. Protective factors are characteristics, whether they relate to people, environments or situations, that decrease the potential for offending (Whyman, 2019).

Indeed, as FiMT funded research has found;

'The military may help to hold ruptures from childhood and, in some cases, psychological defences/ symptoms like emotional numbing and hypervigilance may prove initially helpful in service.'
(Palmer et. al., 2021, p.8)

In addition to providing opportunities to achieve status, support and inclusion in an appropriate manner, participants were also exposed to the best strategies to avoid the pre-existing risk factors associated with crime and dysfunction at home, as well as opportunities to achieve status, support and inclusion in an appropriate manner during and after enlistment.

Practitioner Insights

"It is clear that the most positive thing about their time in the military was the sense of trust and family and team thinking because that is the thing they cite as most difficult when they leave. They could trust their comrades with their lives. Leaving that behind and the sense of mistrust in civilians too - I hear that a lot."

(Justice sector practitioner)

Quotes from Participants: Protective Factors

Up until joining the military I've always lacked confidence... because I had no education... and me dad used to favour my brother, so I was always, like, trying to get acceptance... to be fitting in, and I think that's stayed with me, throughout my life, trying to be fitting in, get acceptance... you don't realise how much your childhood affects you as an adult.

-Veteran on Probation

Participants spoke of acceptance and being part of a family.

The military, for me, was like a family, you know? It gave me that family support I never had as a kid... When you're with your brothers... you're like one, you're accepted as one.

-Veteran on Probation

In order to be a part of the family, you had to think as a group, rather than as an individual. That would prove to be difficult later in life. However, it was a necessity in the military.

It's the cameraderie, the companionship, we'd have each other's back any time. It's instilled in you as well, your basic training, you've got to rely on the guy next to you and the guy on the other side of you and it's a big vicious circle and you've got to rely on each other to look after each other, to keep each other safe and it's instilled in you.

- Veteran on Probation

It was pointed out by participants that not all who join the military are included, with bullying during service being a major issue.

When you join that young they call you a pad rat and that is not something you want to be. They just taunt you and laugh at you and batter you and laugh.

- Veteran on Probation

I don't know, I guess I just didn't fit in and they hounded me for it.

- Veteran on Probation

02

Risk Factors

- Alcohol as a Reward
- Normalising Violence
- Gendered Violence
- Unhealthy Sexual Behaviour

The Risks of Military Service

In contrast to these protective factors, our participants described how they faced adversity within their military careers. In particular, we learned that young recruits were retraumatised during basic training and their early careers. Participants described:

- Use of violence to resolve peer conflicts and bullying.
- Alcohol was a part of military routines and was used for rewards.
- Ritualised sexual activity.
- Intimate partner violence.

Several participants recalled instances where risky or potentially dangerous behaviour was observed within a military setting. Typically, those behaviours were minimised, or even encouraged. Additionally, violence was seen as a method of reshaping recruits and a means of resolving conflict among soldiers in barracks. Violence was also described as an expression of masculinity and as a tool for bullying fellow military personnel - both by peers and across the chain of command.

Previous research (see Fear et. al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2009) has indicated that excessive alcohol use was regarded as a cultural mainstay within the service system, as well as a means to 'fit in' and enhance bonding. This was true for our participants.

These findings also support those studies that have suggested that such excessive use was linked to ineffective coping strategies that hide or disguise mental illness (McGarry and Walklate, 2015; Thandi et. al., 2015). Equally alcohol's relationship with violence is well established. Alcohol-related violence resulted frequently in military police involvement (see also Moorhead, 2019). Several interviewees also described military culture as an unhealthy environment for sexual development, where pornography and prostitution were common themes (n.5). As seen in the testimonies of participants, there is an overtly masculinised culture associated with alcohol, violence and sex (n.13).

The government and military agencies have identified better access to services for victims of domestic abuse as a priority, as reflected in the Domestic Abuse Act (Home Office, 2021) and the Ministry of Defence's (2018) Domestic Abuse Strategy. Personnel may be at risk of perpetrating intimate partner violence in part due to aspects of military training and culture, such as the legitimation of violence in a military setting and the male hierarchical system (Bradley, 2007; Jones, 2012; Melzer, 2002). Previous research indicates that combat exposure and deployments are both associated with higher rates of intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) in military families (Kwan et al., 2018; Kwan et al., 2020). Recently FiMT funded research explored the impact of military life on IPVA, help-seeking and support (Alves-Costa et al 2021).

Quotes from Participants: Risk Factors

The culture... in the whole military... were really known for drinking bad... there was a lot of alcohol... I fitted in, I drank heavy amounts.

- Veteran in Custody

There was always madness... the soldiers, the drinking environment, strip clubs... It was all there - it was always some form of trouble, it was always there.

-Veteran In Custody

My squadron... at the time was particularly a drinking culture. The lads getting tied to the bed and beaten up when they're asleep.

- Veteran on Probation

Typically bar fights, slapping their missus when they've had too much drink and all this kind of shit. In the military everyone is always fighting when they've had a drink and that, that's just what you do.

- Veteran on Probation

Unhealthy sexual thought processes is going to be a massive one [issue] in the armed forces... it's a very unhealthy environment of sexual thinking. So you have people who will, nightly, visit brothels and are exposed to a lot of pornography... they have a very skewed thought process of what sex is.

- Veteran in Custody

You've got a learnt behaviour that has been normalised through prostitution and pornography... and they commit an offence in seeking gratification.

- Veteran in Custody

03

Deployment Trauma

- Bereavement
- Witnessing Violence
- Combat Violence

Deployment Trauma

Combat was a significant turning point in the lives of those who had been deployed (n.12). They were confronted with a different type of violence than they were accustomed to and were affected as a result.

The participants described their experiences of bereavement and the impact that losing a comrade had on them. Many have lost more than one person important to them within a short period of time. They felt inadequately prepared for the visceral reality that deployment brings along with the emotional effects of loss. The necessity of having to 'just get on with it' had an impact upon them later in their lives.

Witnessing violence and how combat violence affects all the senses was a key theme. As a result of seeing such violence, but also hearing it, smelling it and feeling it. Participants who experienced adversity in their childhood began to decline after these experiences.

FiMT-funded research has recently determined that through skills such as emotional numbing and hypervigilance (known to hold ruptures of childhood trauma), young recruits may indeed find the protective factors and defences required to cope with adverse childhood experiences. Later exposure to deployment trauma weakens those defences (Palmer et. al., 2021). Our participants indicated that during deployment their coping mechanisms became completely overwhelmed.

Quotes from Participants: Deployment Trauma

It wasn't so good... We had a lot of guys killed, not just on operations but as a result of the operations, either ending their lives or their heads had gone and they go and do stupid things. We lost three guys in a car crash, four guys in the car, one survivor, three killed. We had a guy blow the top of his head off - he put his rifle in his mouth. Another guy just mysteriously died, "death by misadventure" they put that one down to... So we had a lot of fatalities, a lot of deaths going on at the time... It is very difficult, yes. But it's part and parcel of the job.

- Veteran in Custody

My mental health did start to deteriorate in the military, and I did seek help... when I come back [from Afghanistan]. I still felt like, I still felt like I was still in a conflict zone like I remember sleeping downstairs with like, those big Gurkha knives, and I was thinking that was protecting me family, you know. I got paranoid and I still felt like I was in a conflict zone. And I was self-isolating, and I started drinking at night, when I wasn't really a drinker... I used to drink, to just get wrecked... to help me sleep at night.

-Veteran on Probation

I think that was the first time, it was the reality of death, because you train in the Forces, it's constant, you train, you fire guns, you clean guns, you fire guns... it just gets ingrained into you. But then, obviously, to see it at a very close hand... I was scared because I didn't expect it, you know, and it kind of put me on edge.

- Veteran in Custody

Overlaying protections with risk

- Risk Reward
- Conditional Protections

Risks and Protective Factors Conflated

It would, however, be too simplistic to consider the appeals (i.e., protective factors) and the risks associated with military service separately. The two coexist and are mutually supportive.

Protective factors have been described in existing literature as able to reduce or ameliorate the likelihood of future offending taking place through counteracting the risk factors that can encourage one to offend (Durrant, 2017; Wyman, 2019). Nevertheless, some of the protective factors that participants sought and encountered within the military setting were also directly linked to risk factors as well as resulting in the commission of harmful behaviour.

For example, participants explained that in order to remain in the 'brotherhood' they would have to fight or drink excessively. Additionally, they were encouraged to engage in multiple sexual relationships. Cultural messages about camaraderie and bonding are often accompanied by excessive drinking, fighting on a night out and protecting one's own self at all costs. Accommodations for military personnel acting as a place of protection, aggression and conflict resolution.

Ultimately, seeking and finding protective factors within the military represented circumstances associated with increased risk of future harm.

Quotes from Participants: Overlaying protections with risk

Violence was a way to ensure your acceptance and your unity:

When I was with my unit, my regiment, in different countries, having scraps in Canada, but that was more, standing up for your own. So, we used to get in fights, but, togetherness, sticking up for your own.

- Veteran on Probation

You had to do it [fight], if you get what I mean. You know that's how it was, if you didn't they would anyway so you may as well be part of it. It was just what you did. It was great, don't get me wrong, but it wasn't exactly a choice it was a way of living.

- Veteran on Probation

It's what I learned in the forces, and I learned to deal with my emotions through alcohol or violence.

- Veteran in Custody

I drank to mask it all.

- Veteran on Probation

If one of your friends was up fighting, it was encouraged for you to support them.

- Veteran on Probation

06

Narratives of Transition

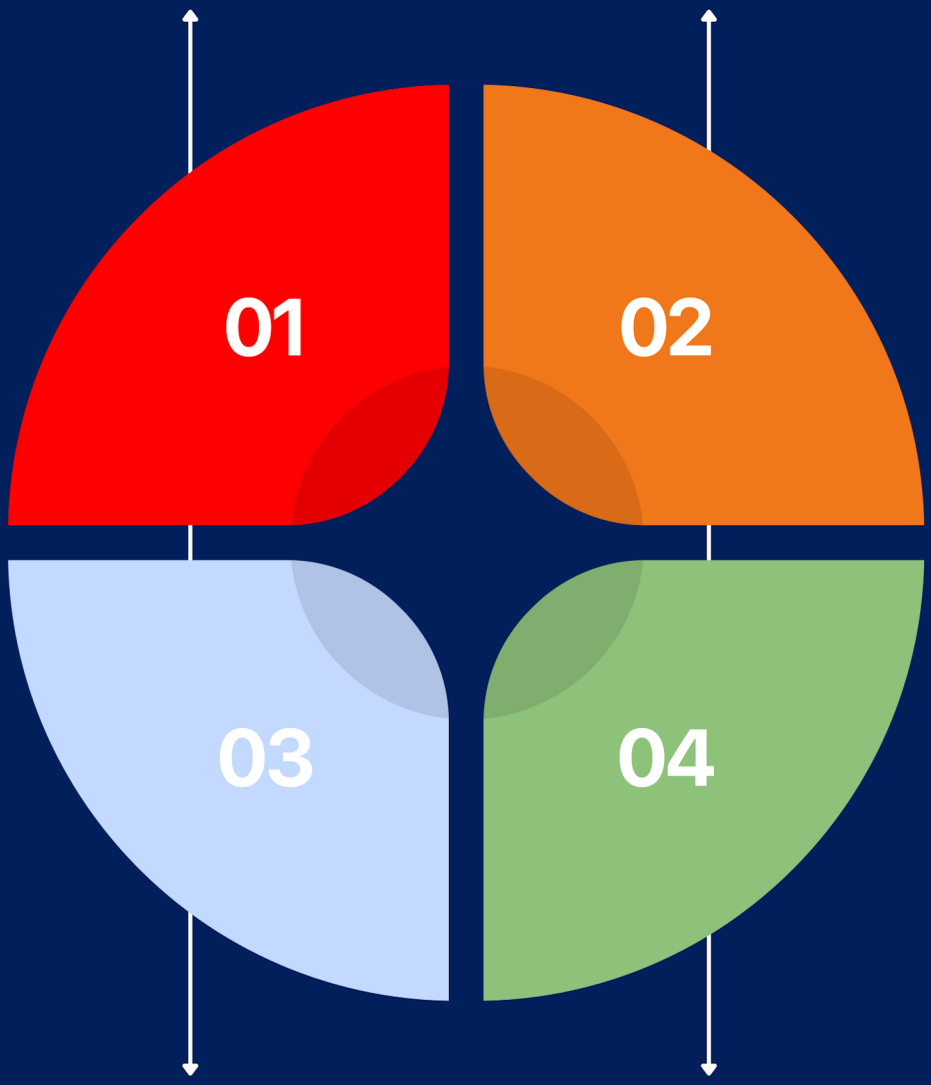
The findings in the study suggest that transition is often a time when individuals move away from both the protective factors associated with military service, as well as from the culture that sustains and maintains risk-taking behaviour. Data indicates that participants were not able to retain the protective factors they had acquired while serving in the armed forces, but instead continued to exhibit risky behaviours.

Brotherhood, acceptance, camaraderie, kinship, family unity, housing and financial security that had once been so important to them had now been taken away. In addition to that, the participants also had to learn how to deal with how the civilian world responds to situations of violence, excessive alcohol use, and unhealthy sexual behaviour or attitudes, which was very different from their military experiences.

Key Findings

Dishonourable Discharge

Medical Discharge



Loss of Protective Factors = Risk

Risk factors reimagined = Risk +

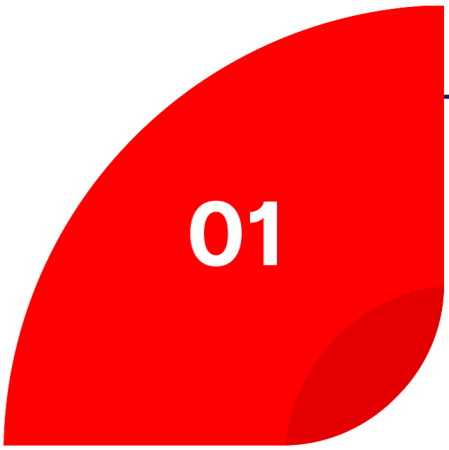
Upon Transition...

1 **Protective factors lost**

= Risk Factors

2 **Risk factors reimagined**

= Risk+



Dishonourable Discharge

- Absent Without Leave (AWOL)
- Contact with Military Police
- Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC)

Dishonourable Discharge

There were three key themes from participants who were dishonourably discharged (n.8). Participants often went absent without leave (AWOL), became involved with the military police (n.12) or Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC) (n.5) and it was during this time, that the positive understandings of themselves as soldiers began to unravel. Several participants also described periods in which they began to withdraw psychologically while still in the military.

Importantly, we found that the time interval between serving in the military and transitioning into the justice sector was relatively short for our participants. Most of the participants (n. 12) in the study entered the justice system within 12-months of leaving the military. There were a significant number (n.7) of our sample who were sentenced for their offences whilst still in the military. For this group their 'veteran' or 'ex-military status' was only realised in court. For this group resettlement from the military happens in civilian custody. We note that as these men were transitioning out of the military, they were also in the process of transitioning into the justice sector.

AWOL presented many opportunities for the Armed Forces to intervene and support personnel. On several occasions, we were told that MCTC was not like a prison. There were a number of participants who reported experiences of re-traumatisation there. As mentioned earlier, the life histories the basis of our findings span 65 years. These accounts of the MCTC below may not take place today, but they are nonetheless vital for professionals in the justice sector to know in their work with veterans of that era.

Based on these findings, recommendation 6 has been made. It is imperative that the Tri-Service Resettlement Provision (MoD 2020) develops a set of specific resettlement pathways tailored for dishonourably discharged individuals. MCTC should integrate these into its practices. The Inspection Report on MCTC (May 2022) draws attention to the positive improvements that have been made in rehabilitation at MCTC. There is however an ongoing concern regarding the oversight of individuals in the community who have been convicted committing sexual or violent offences and have been released from MCTC.

Quotes from Participants: Dishonourable Discharge

Then obviously I started rebelling then and started going on leave and not coming back and then I would come back two or three weeks later and then they would put me in prison and then I would get out of prison and they would do the same thing to me and then I would go on the run again and they would put me back in prison and then they would do the same thing to me again. I would go on the run again and that was like a little pattern, I think it was for about a year or 18 months and then I went for quite a while. I just went missing completely, off the radar for about a year. Then they eventually arrested me for drug offences and obviously as soon as they found out who I was, they realised I was AWOL from the army.

– Veteran in Custody

On the last day I was called down in front of the Colonel, where he applied for my discharge on the grounds of bringing disrepute to the Forces. And I was gone that day. The thing is that I was doing everything that they taught me to do, and especially when I'd just recently done that escape and evasion course, I kind of practised... It was chaos.

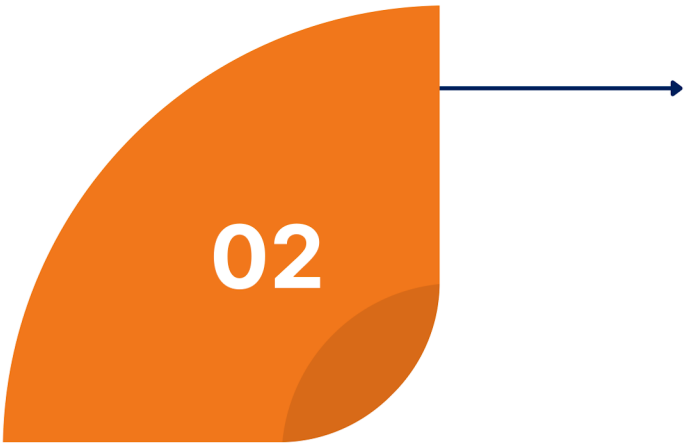
– Veteran in Custody

I'd started to withdraw, I stopped going out and I started to withdraw more. And I don't know, I just didn't know what I was feeling, I didn't know. I would shut myself in my room and lock the door, and I just was too scared to mix with people. It just came all of a sudden and I didn't know why... I did have some leave booked, but it was not soon, and I ran, I didn't know what to do so I ran... And I got caught, went back, and I was sentenced to twenty–one days in the glasshouse [MCTC] for it. And not one person ever asked me or came to see me and said, "What the hell is going on"?

– Veteran in Custody

I went AWOL twice and nobody ever asks you if you are ok.

– Veteran in Custody



Medical Discharge

- Feelings of Abandonment
- Returning to sites of Childhood Adversity

Medical Discharge

A number of studies have examined the impact of medical discharge on service leavers (Brunger et. al., 2013; Hynes et. al., 2021). The central theme of these studies was the loss of identity. Our results are similar to those in these studies. All participants felt a sense of loss. As a result, a number of participants felt abandoned, worthless and confused, which caused a poor psychosocial reintegration. Many participants believe that this sense of loss contributed to their offending behaviour.

A variety of reasons were cited for medical discharge (n.5). We found that for some participants, the process of medical discharge from the military is often lengthy and frustrating, leading to a feeling of being cast aside from the service and no longer needed. For others it was an abrupt and humiliating process. Feelings of complete isolation and abandonment were common for all who left the military via this route. Specifically, it is important to note that as protective factors provided for them by the military are removed, many were returning to the environment from which they originally sought escape from childhood adversity.

Quotes from Participants: Discharge

Yes, depression and anxiety and bullying and that... They flew me back to England and said, "You're basically on sick leave until we find you a new unit." It never happened. My sergeant major got involved and I got a call saying, "Service no longer required..."
I wanted to serve 22 years.

- Veteran on Probation

I was just having medical issues [mental health} and then it got pointed out to, obviously the higher powers and obviously when you're carrying firearms and stuff like that... I just got basically booted to the side... your career is over but you're still going to stay in the army and be treated like shit....

-Veteran in Custody

The next minute you are back there [at home with parents] but you are different now.

- Veteran on Probation

That's it, you're nothing again, nobody - just like that you are nobody to them or anyone around you. Back to where you started.

-Veteran on Probation

So, they took me off duties and put me on light duties and that's where it really spiralled downwards from there. I started to get bullied a bit. I was getting menial tasks, all the shit jobs. I couldn't carry weapons... just made to do errands and stuff like that and I fucking proper rebelled and started going missing.

- Veteran in Custody

03

Loss of Protective Factors = Risk

- Alcohol no longer rewarded
- Violence not justified

A physical, psychological, cultural and social transition

The protective factors offered by military service were lost when our participants left the military. Protective factors that are identified as decreasing future offending (Whyman, 2019) (both physical and practical), such as housing, health care and financial support, as well as structure and uniformity of daily life were taken away - sometimes abruptly. In addition, there were psychological, cultural and social losses. The most challenging aspect was the absence of camaraderie, status, respect and being around people who understood and normalised trauma, alcohol and the many different faces of violence.

Participants described such experiences as a time of isolation, anxiousness, misplacement and misunderstanding. With no sense of purpose and no sense of rank, veterans had difficulty integrating back into civilian life. Feelings of resentment and frustration impacted their choices when returning to civilian life.

Our findings are consistent with those of Palmer et. al., (2021, p. 21);

"When someone leaves military service, there is a separation from the ideological sense-making frameworks (such as operational language, logic, and psychology of warfare) that are used to structure complex and extreme exposures in the field".

Quotes from Participants: Loss of Protective Factors = Risk

Basically they just let me come out of the door with no help, no resettlement, no nothing, no psychological help, no nothing, no mental health help, no physical help, no follow-up, go and see this person or here is a support and care package. They just abandoned me and that's what I felt, I felt abandoned and I think that's why I started getting involved in more serious crime because I felt abandoned, I felt anti-authority, I felt like my life had failed and I had to go out and the only real thing, my mates were all still doing the same thing, committing crime. So, really that was the only thing I had going for me.

- Veteran in Custody

Isolation is a horrendous thing to everyone, and a veteran absolutely feels isolated... nobody understands. Civilians will not understand at all. You daren't start going into detail about the things you've experienced because you'll either break down and cry, and that might be a weakness or you'll traumatise whoever you're telling about what you're telling them about. So that isolation develops, again, unhealthy thought processes and perhaps that person goes into a realm where they don't care.

Yeah, because you've got all that camaraderie and brotherhood that you get from all the other lads... You go from that to a lot of people just on their own in a flat somewhere and they don't know what to do with themselves. They had a sense of community, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, a respectable position. I felt undervalued and no purpose and lost for a long, long time.

-Veteran in the community

When you join the army and do basic training they blatantly tell you that they've got three months to turn you from a civilian into a soldier. A trained killing machine. You're not a person, you're a number. That's quite psychological because then you do your phase two and then you get institutionalised with your regiment and then you leave. You're used to having 600, 800 blokes around you. You're used to that regimented way of life you're told what to do where to go what to wear and then you leave and it's like you wonder why people are committing suicide left, right and centre. They've seen all this shit, they've done shit, and then they're in civilian life and you're a fucking misfit... I felt misunderstood, misplaced. I'm just very, very different to everybody else.

-Veteran in the community

Risk Factors Reimagined = Risk +

- Violence
- Alcohol
- Mental Health Issues

Risk factors reimagined = Risk +

We found that loss of self-esteem and confidence caused by excessive drinking towards the end of a military career or during transition can result in isolation, exclusion, and mental health issues. Therefore, our participants noted that alcohol abuse became a catalyst for escalating other risk factors as well as a risk factor in and of itself. Additionally to being used as a coping mechanism, excessive alcohol consumption was also used to self-medicate.

As a result, suicide ideation and the deterioration of mental health were commonplace. Additionally, this was met with feelings of resentment on the part of the veteran, as they felt that the mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, were caused by their military service as well as the lack of support they received afterwards.

Quotes from Participants: Risk factors reimagined = Risk +

I think the MoD needs to do a lot more, do you know what I mean? You're told to, if you've got a confrontation, you don't walk around it, you don't go underneath, you don't go over the top, you go straight through it. And then you go into civilian street, you do that, you're in prison. The prison system is full of ex-squaddies.

- Veteran in Custody

When you're not at war, you're fighting with each other or a different regiment that's nearby or with the locals in town, it's just acceptable. When you become a civilian, it's not. The way you think is not acceptable, the way you approach life is not acceptable. You're a different breed, you don't just get trained, you get brainwashed, this is a drill, this is a drill.

- Veteran in Custody

I just fucking started drinking heavily and taking drugs, just to block everything out [symptoms of PTSD].

- Veteran on Probation

Me marriage broke down, I didn't want to be around the kids, because of the noise and everything. I was drinking, I was a hard person to live with, I was arguing with my ex-missus, we got into a lot of confrontation, violent... I wasn't working, I was getting wrecked, I became homeless, I wasn't functioning as the normal person I am. I was in a mess mate, I didn't care about nothing, I didn't want to live, I didn't see an out. I was a mess.

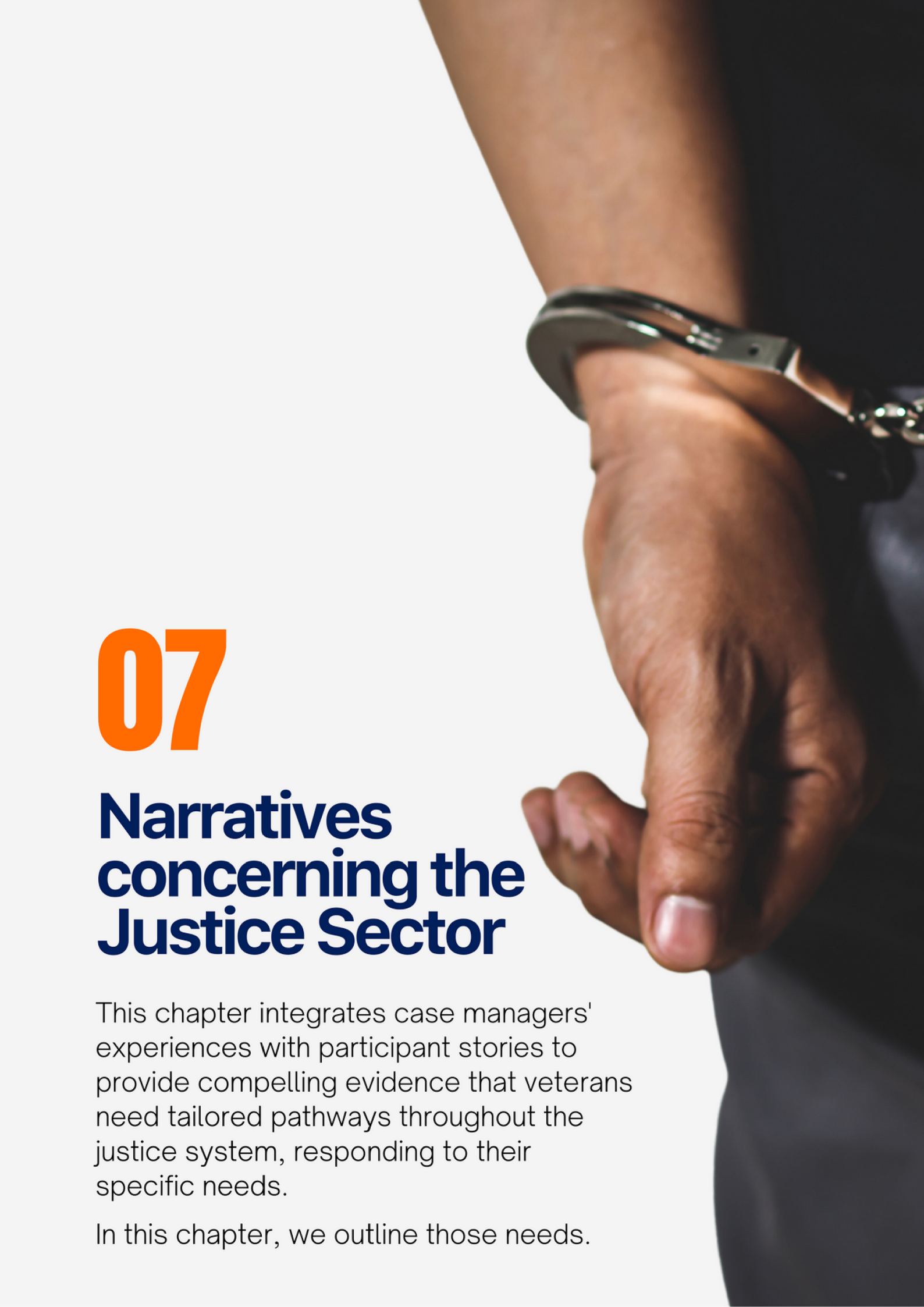
-Veteran on Probation

I was drinking every day... for years after transition... put this way, when I was like, you know, seeking help from the doctor, he said; "if you don't stop drinking, your liver's going to pack in".

-Veteran on Probation

Everything they [the military] taught me to do... (e.g.) the escape and evasion course, I kind of practiced, but for my own personal need [offending].

-Veteran in custody



07

Narratives concerning the Justice Sector

This chapter integrates case managers' experiences with participant stories to provide compelling evidence that veterans need tailored pathways throughout the justice system, responding to their specific needs.

In this chapter, we outline those needs.

Working with Veterans in the Justice Sector

Three key themes emerged;

1. The importance of understanding the unique needs of veteran cohorts, including their cognitive needs, their resettlement needs, and trauma-informed practices is essential.
2. The importance of veteran awareness during resettlement activities, such as transferable skills, peer support and barriers to assistance.
3. To avoid misinformed risk escalation, veteran awareness is crucial when assessing risk.

Unique Needs

"I would argue that veteran - specific work is important as they have different needs than most other prisoners. This does not mean that we should camouflage the environment - it isn't about creating a comfortable space for veterans in custody - but it is about recognising their distinct needs."
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

We found that veterans in the justice sector have a completely different understanding of citizenship. When working with veterans in custody or in the community, this is particularly important. In the same way that services are targeted to other minorities or backgrounds, initiatives are best received when they are based on a lived experience of this identity orientation.

Given that many of our participants had only recently returned to civilian society before they were convicted, a better understanding of the multiple ways veterans present themselves to the justice system is critical. Individuals in custody were at various stages of transitioning from military to civilian life. Interventions in custody must take this into consideration and address it separately.

Our participants entered the justice sector in three ways:

1: Those who have struggled to resettle post-Service and as a result became involved with the justice sector.

2: Those who have been dishonourably discharged as a result of their conviction and therefore are yet to experience resettlement. For this group resettlement from the military takes place in custody and post-custody will mean resettlement from both the military and the prison environment.

3: Those who have been recalled. Recall was a key feature in the lives of n.5 participants. In some cases the recall occurred multiple times (one participants had breached 14 times). It is noteworthy that individuals are rarely recalled for a second offence, rather they are recalled for non-compliance with a court order.

"As they leave here, we want to have helped them become successful citizens. We need to unpick why resettlement didn't work for them last time. Our approach is to offer them the opportunity not to become isolated and disappear... to respect and acknowledge that their needs are different and that they are not coming from a typical mindset."
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

It is important that we understand the different mindset referred to here when working with veteran cohorts.

"We refer to core offending deficits when working with people in custody - such as impulsivity, egocentrism, loss of self-control, and a lack of consequential thinking. Veterans are not like that - in fact, they have been trained not to be like that - they have been taught to operate as a team, to prioritise, to horizon scan, and more."
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

In contrast to the dynamic risk factors present in the civilian offender population, veterans in the criminal justice system possess a different, inclusive and focussed set of skills. Due to this, existing interventions are not effective in addressing the offending behaviour of veterans, who require a set of interventions that are specifically tailored to their life experiences in order to bring about change.

"*When you see someone in prison like a psychologist in training, and they would say; "Well, to be aggressive, you have to be in a situation where your emotions are rising," and I said, "That's not the case. "They went, "No, it is, it's fact, It is." I said "Well, that's not the case is it, because soldiers don't get emotional before they go to conflict".*
(Veteran in Custody)

In this context, approaches to addressing offending behaviour can be understood as aligning with the 'Risk, Need and Responsivity' model (HMIP, 2020). Criminogenic or dynamic risk factors, like impulsivity or deficits in thinking skills, are viewed as contributing to offending behaviour. Within the prison or probation setting, interventions are intended to challenge and reduce these risk factors, thus reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

"Thinking skills, tailored to the military. It could be done, like, how was your... offence (linked) to your military service.... It could expand it. You need to be military oriented... even though you've left the military, you're still part of the military really because it never leaves you."
(Veteran in the Community)

In addition, there is a distinct need for trauma-focused approaches tailored to address the specific needs of veterans. When working with this population, it is crucial to understand that many veterans have been exposed to trauma on multiple fronts, not only in service. Practitioners and policy-makers must have a thorough understanding of the reasons that people join the military, the challenges that they face during basic training and subsequent deployments, as well as the emotional, physical and social obstacles these individuals may encounter when they leave the military. The veteran participants in this study presented with a multitude of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that were further exacerbated by exposure to bullying and violence. Dishonourably discharged veterans often have multiple and complex needs, but are often denied access to a variety of veteran-specific services. There is a need to provide adequate training for all staff that comes into contact with veterans, not just those who are practitioners.

Veteran Awareness Intervention

Support from peers and recognition of strengths are considered essential components of strengths-based practice. Throughout the justice system, peer mentors play a crucial role. Peer support workers are typically required to have first-hand experience of the justice system in order to be eligible to serve as peer support workers. It tends to be connected to a military background, however, to work as a peer support worker for veterans within the justice sector. Peer support is essential for success (Weir et al., 2019). Providing peer support to veterans should include connecting them to specific services, employment opportunities and other appropriate resources, in order to make it an effective means of providing support.

"On the day of their release, I meet them at the admissions desk and take them to their accommodations or wherever they need to go. I work with them to prepare them so I know what their plans are. I check in with them after a few days to see how they are doing. I tell them I don't want to see them in here [custody] again."
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

Full-time peer support is a means of increasing engagement, effective communication and prosocial relationships as well as reducing barriers that prevent veterans from seeking assistance and support (Albertson et. al., 2017). Inconsistencies and variations in provision of such services for veterans within the criminal justice system need to be addressed in order to minimise isolation, enhance opportunities for effective transitions, reduce recidivism and enhance the prospects for long-term stability (Wainwright et. al., 2017).

"We all got on together, we instantly clicked because we had that... even some of the staff were ex-military and we got on better with them than we did with normal officers because they had the military understanding the same as what we had."
(Veteran in Custody)

Additionally, it is important to recognise transferrable skills. Prisoners are expected to participate in educational, skill-building, and employment programmes that promote their development as individuals and enable them to find employment upon release. According to HM Inspectorate of Prisons, the provision prevents reoffending and enhances employability skills so that prisoners are well-prepared to enter higher education, employment, self-employment or training after they are released. Veterans have acquired a set of skills that should be recognised and utilised to support each individual to be able to transfer these skills after serving a sentence.

"They were highly trained, disciplined, self-reliant, respected (at some point in their career) – that all went wrong, but they have been that person, they have achieved that... We want to take those strong lessons and training and engage them with but adapt them to civilian life so that they can use what they already have and reignite it and use it positively to prepare them for the community."
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

Risk and Veterans in the Justice Sector

At some point during their contact with the justice sector, all participants believed that their risk had been escalated or inaccurately assessed.

"A detective inspector saying, when he arrested me, I felt threatened by him because of his previous military experience... you have this instant distrust of somebody because they are a veteran, they become a risk. Hence, now, I have the armed police coming to deal with me if they want to speak to me, there's usually armed backup."
(Veteran in Custody)

"They definitely treated me differently when they found out that I had been in the military. Like I was more dangerous or something because of it."
(Veteran in the Community)

"You hear it from the men that in court it was used against them or their probation officer used it against them in court. It has definitely changed from the old days when you would get a slap on the wrist and thanks for your service. Now it definitely makes people panic."
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

It has been noted in numerous studies that military personnel and veterans face barriers to seeking help (see, most recently, Alves-Costa et al., 2021; Bradley et al, 2021). This was explained to us as a significant risk factor when working with veterans in terms of rehabilitation.

"A core difference when working with veterans in rehab terms is the basic skills of asking for help and their known barriers for help-seeking. Veterans are bad at asking for help, they are much less likely to ask for help. We need to adapt our approach with that in mind. Admitting that you are not OK is converse to military training and mentality. We all need help though so it is about making it OK to ask for help - explaining how you ask for help, and what help looks like and can feel like. Pro-social skills are counter to military skills."
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

Military Informed Nested Ecological Model

In order to provide more individualised and appropriate interventions to the veteran population as well as enhance insight into the risks, needs and protective factors associated with this population, increasing awareness, insight and understanding of the various factors that make veterans unique in the criminal justice system can be regarded as critical. It is crucial to understand the veteran's life course, from adversity in childhood to multiple experiences of transition, competing cultures and changing identities, along with criminality and the involvement and interpretation of the criminal justice system, to skills, strengths, structure and pride. This represents a vital source of insight for practitioners and for veterans in the justice system as well.

This can be achieved by using the Military Informed Nested Ecological Model (Moorhead, 2020). Based on this model, the biographies of veterans can be articulated and arranged across different stages of their life, which will reveal the unique profile of the veteran within the justice system. Here, the various, often competing or disparate characteristics of military and civilian cultures, the challenges within transition and reintegration, as well as an examination of more traditional risks and needs associated with offending behaviour can be delineated and explored. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for veterans in the justice system to reflect critically on their own life journeys, enhance their insight and ownership of it, as well as apply reflective practice to their life course, resulting in a deeper understanding of their own personal journey.

By using such an approach, both the risk and need factors alongside broader understandings around desistance, including insights into protective factors acquired across the life course, can be gleaned to support the reduction of future offending.

Lessons from the Community Navigator Model

The Community Navigator model offers insight into how we may be able to address obstacles faced during transition. Navigators are highly experienced support workers who promote strengths-based, trauma-informed support by creating a bespoke service specific to the individual/target population. As the military community is notoriously averse to help-seeking, a tailored statutory/community service built into the transition process in conjunction with the MoD may mitigate issues. This model seeks to overcome and/or break down barriers by challenging systems that do not work. Having area-specific knowledge and developing strong channels of communication, navigators connect individuals to vital community services. By streamlining support to one main point of contact and ensuring continuity of care via connected practice, navigators can help reduce risk of disengagement, isolation, and exclusion.

08

The Road Ahead: Recommendations

As a result of the interviews conducted with participants in this study, we have been able to gain qualitative insights into the factors that influenced their journeys towards harmful behaviours. Among the findings of this study, we found indicators that may contribute to reducing the likelihood of future serious harm-related offences. Despite the fact that we have identified many commonalities of experience, every individual's story is, of course, unique. Taking the findings of our study as a whole, we are able to suggest some genuine opportunities to improve the outcomes for individuals with similar life experiences. As a result of combining these insights with the comments of professionals and stakeholders, we have provided the following concluding comments and recommendations.

Recommendations

Participation, collaboration and knowledge exchange have been central to the research design of this project. The implications of our findings have been discussed with stakeholders, advisory board members, practitioners and participants. Based on the results obtained from our interviews and knowledge exchange activities, we have developed a series of through-life recommendations for policy and practice. We suggest that there is potential to reduce the risk of serious harm by implementing preventive interventions. However, implementing such interventions requires a connected approach and the commitment of the health, justice, education and welfare sectors, along with the MoD, in order to ensure continuity.

Knowledge of the potential impacts of adversity in early life should inform all interactions with children and young people.

The relationship between childhood adversity and involvement in the criminal justice system is well documented. The results of this study provide further evidence that trauma-informed intervention is critical when dealing with children. As well as integrating and prioritising training on ACEs, it is important to understand the long-term effects of trauma. As other studies have demonstrated, our findings point out the impact of trauma throughout the military life cycle. A connected practice with children requires a whole network approach which includes; health (for example, GPs, school nurses, and health visitors), educational (for example, teachers and administrative staff) social (for example, sports clubs, army cadets and youth clubs) and justice (for example police, courts, youth justice, probation, prison and third sector) organisations.

Recommendation 1:

Health, educational, social and justice organisations must ensure that all staff are adequately trained and have the knowledge and skills necessary to identify childhood adversity and adverse childhood experiences and to respond appropriately to them.

Recommendation 2:

Whenever possible, records of ACEs and other childhood adversities should be sent to the Ministry of Defence when recruiting individuals under the age of 18.

Recommendation 3:

In addition to health practitioners (GPs, community health workers, midwives) and education professionals (teachers, school nurses, support staff, administrators), we recommend the use of our case study learning materials by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice.

The impact of adversity in childhood and trauma across the life course should be recognised throughout ones military career.

The military was perhaps the first institution in the world to fully appreciate the effects of trauma, with the social science around "shell shock" and later, PTSD. In recent years, the MoD have introduced policy and practice concerning wellbeing and trauma in an attempt to shift the culture including mandatory trauma informed practice training (TIP) and mental health training. These developments must be monitored and implemented into subsequent training, policy and practice interventions.

Recommendation 4:

The Armed Forces should identify adversity during recruitment. This should not restrict admission or attach any sort of prejudice but rather present the military with an opportunity to support personnel differently during key stages of risk and need in ones military life (for example post-deployment).

The UK Armed Forces should adopt a proactive approach to trauma-informed practice during the recruitment and selection process. A key component of the enlistment and training processes must identify and monitor the wellbeing of individuals who enter the service with pre-service vulnerabilities, as well as to pay attention to the cultures and practices of basic training which serve to (re)traumatise them.

In order to make recruitment processes more conducive to a trauma-aware culture and to appropriate and progressive activities, a culture change is needed throughout the selection process, particularly for young recruits. In light of recent research (also funded by FiMT), we know that recruits do indeed find the defences required such as emotional numbing and hypervigilance to hold ruptures of childhood traumas - yet later exposure to deployment trauma weakens those defences (see Palmer et al. 2021).

Education concerning the impact of deployment trauma, particularly for those enlisting with early adverse experiences, should be embedded into existing life-skills training. By providing training, support and education tailored to the level of understanding of the personnel, we can better prepare them for such a situation in an emotionally stimulating environment, thus minimising the consequences down the road. Providing such care is also important for staff retention.

Recommendation 5:

In order to cultivate an environment where healthy relationships between personnel are more likely and stronger, a culture change is required among the military (for example, promoting a more progressive view of gender, masculinity and balancing military priorities with relationship/family needs - see also Alves-Costa et. al., 2021). We note that through initiatives such as Operation Teamwork (2022) the Army in particular have demonstrated a commitment to addressing cultural and inclusivity issues. It is crucial that these awareness and training inputs include intimate and interpersonal relationships. We recommend that all new initiatives are evaluated to ensure an accurate measurement of their effectiveness over time.

The military culture was characterised by several interviewees as a potentially unhealthy environment for sexual development, in which pornography and prostitution were prominent themes (n. 5). The testimonies of the participants reveal an overtly masculinised culture associated with alcohol, violence and sex (n.13).

A priority for the government and military has been to increase access to services for victims of domestic abuse, as reflected in the Domestic Abuse Act (Home Office, 2021) and the MoD (2018) Domestic Abuse Strategy. In part, military personnel are at risk of perpetrating intimate partner violence due to aspects of military training and culture, such as the legitimation of violence in a military setting and the male hierarchical structure (Bradley, 2007; Jones, 2012; Melzer, 2002). Several studies have indicated that combat exposure and deployments are associated with higher rates of intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) in military families (Kwan et. al., 2018; Kwan et. al., 2020).

Recommendation 6:

The Tri-Service Resettlement Provision (MoD 2020) must develop a set of staggered and tailored resettlement pathways which are specific to dishonourably discharged personnel. These should be embedded into the practices of Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC). We note the Inspection Report on MCTC (May 2022) which describes positive improvements in rehabilitation. We note however the ongoing concern about oversight in the community of individuals who have been convicted of sexual or violent offences and released from MCTC.

A significant number of our participants went absent without leave (AWOL), were involved with the military police (n.12) or the MCTC (n.5). Our study revealed that transitioning from serving in the military to the justice sector took a relatively short time. The majority of participants (n. 12) in the study entered the justice system almost immediately after transition. Among our sample, a significant number (n.7) were sentenced for their offences while in the military.

Recommendation 7:

It is important for the Armed Forces to move away from punishing personnel who go absent without leave (AWOL) to the development of a support pathway for ensuring their reintegration into their duties upon their return or the establishment or a tailored transition pathway out of service.

A veteran-aware justice sector is essential

"Veteran - specific work is important... This does not mean that we should camouflage the environment... but it is about recognising their distinct needs" .
(Justice Sector Practitioner)

Recommendation 8:

Veteran awareness training should be offered to all areas of the justice sector.

The Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-2024; p.3) suggests a further rolling out of accredited training for health providers and the introduction of veteran-aware training for social work teams in every Local Authority. We would suggest that this should be extended beyond social work teams, expanding veteran-awareness training to health, statutory, justice and third sector organisations.

Specific pathways should pay particular attention to different approaches that apply to re-settlement needs, cognitive needs, full-time peer support, help seeking, transferable skills, family interventions and mental health issues. There is a great deal of responsibility for the support of veterans in the third sector, with Armed Forces charities having a significant responsibility in this regard. During this research, it was found that this charitable sector does not, in the main, work with veterans who have committed sexual offences in the past. As a solution, we propose statutory pathways and interventions that take veteran well-being into account.

Recommendation 9:

To build pathways of support for those who have committed sexual offences, statutory bodies within the justice sector must work with charities that support armed forces personnel. This programme of intervention should include awareness-raising and education activities, as well as accredited training to ensure that third sector agencies have confidence in the support they can offer.

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Ex-Armed Services Personnel
Journeys to Harmful Behaviour

NARRATIVES CONCERNING THE JUSTICE SECTOR

- Specific needs
- Risk often escalated and misunderstood
- A need for a tailored approach

NARRATIVES TOWARDS CHANGE

- Trauma informed practice with children and young people
- ACE aware practice for Ministry of Defence
- Veteran-aware justice sector

NARRATIVES OF TRANSITION

- Risk and protective factors inversed and exacerbated
- Exclusion and isolation
- Dishonourable Discharge

NARRATIVES OF MILITARY SERVICE

- The military provide protective factors
- The risk of military service
- Risk and protective factors conflated

NARRATIVES OF PRE-MILITARY ADVERSITY

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Broader childhood adversity
- Military used to escape and transform

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