

## Research Article

# Life Story Research: Methods, Theory and Analysis in Exploring Addictions and Substance Misuse with Military Veterans Exposed to the Criminal Justice System within the United Kingdom

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## Abstract

This article aims to provide an outline of, and insight of how the lead authors PhD study was theoretically informed primarily by post-positivist thought. This approach will demonstrate the study's ontological position and the significant epistemological consequences in capturing the lived realities of military veterans. These individuals were exposed to the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and had health and social care needs, inclusive of addictions and substance misuse. The paper presents the methods used within a 7-year study that adopted an interpretivist approach to gather the various perspectives of veterans (veteran offenders and veteran practitioners) in order to develop an understanding of their life experiences prior to, during military service, and subsequently post-sentence or employment within the CJS. This article provides a methodological focus which would assist in an understanding of the veterans' (participants') lives as interpreted by these individuals whilst acknowledging reflexivity due to shared military identities between participant and the lead author (researcher). Finally, the paper demonstrates how life story research and its analysis through thematic approaches can provide insight, whilst also acknowledging and conceptualising some of the challenges that can be overcome through the study's selected methods to create new knowledge on the lived experiences of military veterans with specific health, social and well-being care needs.

**Keywords:** Substance misuse; Addiction; Criminal justice system; Military veterans

## Introduction

Within the study by Mottershead (2019) 17 individuals participated and gave their consent to allow their life stories to be shared [1]. They all held the identity of a veteran; however 8 of these veterans had since leaving the Armed

Forces acquired roles within the CJS as practitioners. The remaining 9 had either through a series of unfortunate events or of their own volition, become embroiled within the CJS as offenders. This study defines the 2 sub-groups as follows:

1. Veteran practitioner, an individual who has performed military service for at least one day and drawn a day's pay is identified as a veteran [2]. They had been an employee within one of the recognised institutions of the CJS.
2. Veteran offender, an individual who has performed military service for at least 1 day and drawn a day's pay is identified as a veteran [2]. In relation to the label of ex-offender, the same individual had been charged with a crime, managed by the CJS and all sentences were spent.

The 2 distinct life story trajectories provide a composite insight into the lived experiences and the understanding of these experiences by these 17 individual veterans and their health and social care needs, inclusive of addictions and substance misuse. The methods adopted within this life story study demonstrated the importance of lived experience of these veterans in the CJS and how their understanding and intuition could provide insight into the

specific healthcare needs and how addictions and substance misuse was a feature within the needs of these individuals.

To date this is the only known study that sought to represent both sides of veterans' perception of their lived experience through life story research. The study sought to overcome the barriers of an established professional privilege of mean making and adopt a moral imperative to embrace emancipatory research practices [3,4]. Crotty (1998) explains that mean making within social constructionism refers to the entirety of establishing meaning and that all meaningful reality is socially constructed [3]. In addressing the categorical or moral imperative the lead author is addressing what Kant (1964) described as an imperative or ultimate commandment towards reason, from which all duties and obligations derive [4]. Kant (1964) defined an imperative as any proposition declaring a certain action to be necessary. Therefore, this paper provides a contribution to the field of inclusive and emancipatory penological research with insight into addictions and substance misuse [4].

Polkinghorne (2007) supports the logic for this inclusive approach as new meaning will be established that can be developed through creating of a new formulation for the story-tellers sense of identity that will progress past the one that they perceive currently defines them [5]. In so doing so this creates a greater understanding for the reader of the participants (veterans) own unique life experiences. Notable research within this specific research area undertaken by the Defence Analytical Services and Advice and the National Association of Probation Officers has been of a quantitative and positivist approach [6,7]. As highlighted within the life story research of Atkinson (1998) and Riessman (2008) this can be due to the complex challenges associated with gaining consent and establishing trust with hard to reach and marginalised groups [8,9]. The lead author is himself is a veteran and mental health nurse and this feature established an awareness of a need for reflexivity throughout the study so that; as Plummer (2001) advocates the formation of trust can be established for those with similar lived and shared experiences but with a need to adhere to impartiality [10]. The life stories were at times difficult to listen to and re-listen as they captured not only success but sadly, failure, diminished prospects and shattered identities linked in part to the presence of addictions and substance misuse. The life stories shake our faith in the system's ability to divert and support those with unmet physical and mental health needs and that Sir John Nutting QC notes are owed a debt by society [11]. In contrast, the lead author conducted a recent study within the Middle East and whilst there were similar challenges around transitioning to a civilian identity and role, there was no evidence of issues relating to addictions and substance misuse reported [12]. However, a later study by the same authors demonstrated that for the wider general population within the region there was potential to explore therapeutic alliances to manage and treat addictions and substance misuse disorders [13]. This article will conclude on highlighting the usefulness of adopting life story methods to allow for an exploration into

veterans' presence within the CJS and how to effectively provide care and treatment. Despite the hardships located within the veterans' life stories there is also a testimony to the veterans' ability to transform and adapt, even in the face of some of life's most difficult challenges associated with addictions and substance misuse.

### Sampling and Setting

Suresh, et al. (2012) explain that determining the optimal sample size for a study guarantees an adequate ability to detect a degree of significance and is therefore a critical step in the design of a planned research proposal [14]. Guest, et al. (2006) explain that determining a sample size typically relies on the concept of saturation, meaning the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data [15]. Smith (2015) suggests that there are different sample sizes depending upon the research [16]. For a PhD piece of research Smith, et al. (2013) suggest that smaller sample sizes can be useful where a detailed exploration of the phenomenon from several different perspectives can be highly beneficial, however Smith (2015) suggests that there is no exact number and it depends on the individual study and when data saturation has been achieved [16,17].

The lead author decided to use snowball sampling as a recruitment strategy. This sample technique provided an appropriate response to overcoming the problems associated with sampling this population. Lee (1993) explains that the snowballing technique is particularly useful when attempting to access participants who may be reluctant to share their life stories, especially for those with addictions and substance misuse issues [18]. This is supported by Vogt (1999), who stipulates that a snowballing approach is an appropriate technique when attempting to access hard to reach populations such as the deprived and socially stigmatised [19]. The study sought to take advantage of his established social networks to identify veteran practitioners and offenders (participants) to provide the study with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts. The lead author relied upon the assumption that a 'bond' or 'link' exists between the initial sample and others in the same target population, which allowed for a series of referrals to be made to the researcher from within a circle of acquaintances as espoused by Berg (1988) [20]. According to Thomson (1997), it can be prudent to engage with a number of stakeholders in order to source participants [21]. This prior contact and established relationship was advantageous as this snowballing approach allowed for the introduction of participants from their peers to the researcher, which, as Seidman (1998) explains, facilitates a reduction in the power differential between the researcher and the participants [22].

The lead author (researcher) found the setting to be an important factor in conducting life story interviews in this study. The researcher needed to take a creative and flexible approach to interviewing, which included negotiating home visits and the use of appropriate facilities within various organisations from within the CJS. The interviews were undertaken in a variety of settings, e.g. veterans home,

police station, university campus, probation offices, job centre, veterans place of work, and hostel. As some of the veterans (offenders) had a history of assault, a lone worker protocol was established with both a supervisor and a member of the research office. It was the researcher's role to enable the best environment possible to elicit stories and to assist the participants to feel comfortable with the interviewing task. This is in parallel with the research of Etherington (1995) in her study on adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse and later on trauma and drug misuse and how this transformed identities [23]. She stipulates that interviewing people with substance misuse issues can be challenging but that selecting an appropriate setting can be key to a successful life story interview.

### **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

It was decided to utilise a snowballing sample of veterans who would have lived experience as either offenders or as skilled practitioners within the CJS. At the time that the research commenced, the topic of veterans' involvement in the CJS and their health and social care needs was only starting to be debated on a regional and national level. The study aimed to recruit veterans who had first-hand experience of working within the CJS, e.g., prison officers, probation staff, police officers and organisations from the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector who have become an important feature in supporting offenders within the British judicial system. The offender group needed to have had first-hand experience of being dealt with by the CJS, e.g. through incarceration in prison, or going before the magistrate or crown courts of the juridical system. There were no time limits set to the length of service served within the Armed Forces or time spent in the CJS. Relevant experience for the practitioner group was defined as having been employed by the Armed Forces, before undertaking career progression to work in the CJS. For the offender group, they needed to have been in the Armed Forces and then spent time in prison, with the inclusion of detention on remand, a full custodial sentence, police custody and having been in court due to an offence. The life story interviews focused on the lived experiences of the health and social care needs of the participants, their families and wider societal experiences [1,12,24-26].

### **Informed consent**

In accordance with recommendations from Stanley, et al. (1996) potential participants were provided with information, focusing on either a practitioner or offender remit [27]. Consideration on how this information was given and recognising the impact of the environmental setting in which this information was conveyed were important factors. Throughout the research process, the University of Chester's Code of Ethics was strictly adhered to in following the guidance as set out within the Code of Practice for Research [24]. In accordance with Informed consent was obtained from individual participants and relevant authorities within the CJS. Participants and organisations were fully informed of the purpose, goals and intended methods of the study prior to their participation through a written outline brief of the proposed study as

well as face-to-face meetings as recommended by Soothill (1999) [28]. The lead author explained that they were not obliged to participate in the study, could choose not to answer the questions, and could withdraw from the study at any time. The veteran practitioners found the interviewing process to be cathartic, however the offender sub-group required support especially when discussing issues relating to their abuse of alcohol, illicit substances and the consequences on their life. As advised by Noaks, et al. (2004), the interviews were structured so as to end on a positive note, and on conclusion participants were asked whether they needed to speak to the designated representative from the supporting agency [29].

### **Data protection and confidentiality**

The lead author was mindful that they held a responsibility to guarantee the integrity of how the research study was conducted. Given the degree of trust placed on them by the veterans (participants) there was a need to ensure that this was honoured. Each audio recording was password protected, was never duplicated and once the full transcription of the life story interview was completed the audio recordings were destroyed. In accordance with Bryman (2012), the names of the veterans were anonymised both within the produced transcripts and within the original study [30]. It was believed by the lead author that the identification of the veteran as either a 'Practitioner' or 'Offender' would assist the reader in compartmentalising the veteran 2 sub-groups. The lead author was the only individual with full access to the recorded life story interviews and produced transcripts throughout the length of the research study.

### **Reflexivity**

According to Tanggaard (2008), within qualitative research it is recommended that narrative accuracy checks are undertaken to ensure that a high degree of accuracy, credibility, validity and transferability are established and maintained [31]. It was found that the process of reviewing the transcripts and stories with the participants was a vital procedure throughout the study. Cohen, et al. (2008) acknowledges this process within their own research and add that this approach can prevent personal biases from being included within the qualitative research study [32].

The lead author ascertained that engaging in participant validation was an important step in ensuring that the process of reflexivity could occur. The need to incorporate reflexivity into the study was important as he had a background that could have created a biased view if he did not progress the validation of the findings of data, as advised by Miles, et al. (1994); Higate, et al. (2006) [33,34]. As discussed by Finlay (2002), reflexivity has been defined as "thoughtful conscious self-awareness," on the part of the researcher [35]. According to Carolan (2003), this is of significant importance within interpretive informed research [36]. In adopting this tradition within the methods, it allowed for the development and understanding of 'self' upon the research data. Guba, et al. (2005) argue that it is crucial that the researcher maintains

an appreciation of their effect on participant behaviour, creation of data and the research process as a whole [37]. As the lead author is himself a veteran the study continually adhered to the principle of reflexivity meaning there was a continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself [35].

In order to adhere to a reflexive approach there was a need to ensure that an alternative arrangement was in place for those participants who were unable to access an electronic device to check their transcript. A process of cross-checking was established in which the researcher would summarize verbally what had been discussed and ensure that any alterations were added to the main transcript *via* a telephone conversation. Hammersley, et al. (1995) describe a process entitled participant validation which allows for the stories to be reviewed by the individuals that told them and also allowed for the added function by acknowledging participants lives and allowing them to have ownership of the data collection process [38].

### Data collection

Both groups were interviewed through the use of semi-structured interviews but given the difference in their contact with the CJS, there was a need to create 2 separate sets of questions within the interview schedule. The interviews also provided the researcher an opportunity to gather additional general information about the CJS about how it manages veteran offenders and how this complex system provides employment for veterans.

The participants were located throughout England and Wales and the process of collecting the stories from across country took 5 months to complete. As discussed, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format using an interview schedule devised to incorporate themes from the scoping review. Bachman, et al. (2013) recommend this approach as it ensures that all dominant themes and main areas of interest were covered, guaranteeing consistency between interviews, whilst also maintaining sufficient flexibility to allow for unanticipated themes to be identified and discussed [39]. This approach was adopted due to the evidence provided by Bryman (2012), who stated that this strategy encouraged interviewees to fully communicate their experiences through open, free-flowing accounts that could then be explored with prompts and open questions [30].

### Discussion

#### Identifying the veteran sub-groups: Label of veteran

The challenge in this research has been to work with the veteran offender participants in a respectful way that honours their service to their nation, but also acknowledges and records their contact with the CJS. The stigma and associated shame at being labelled a 'veteran offender' as well as those that had an addiction and substance misuse issue created an additional challenge in locating participants who would agree to be interviewed.

Participants were also selected on the basis that they had been identified and confirmed as veterans, either by the employing organisation (practitioners), or the supporting organisation. The veteran offender participants needed to be made aware from the start that this label and their maladaptive behaviours would be highlighted and used in the dissemination of findings. At times, some gate-keeping agencies also appeared to be protective of providing potential participants. It was ensured that the aim and reason for collecting the life stories was relayed to potential stakeholders.

### The participants

As recommended by Silverman (2011), the recruitment of participants was based on snowball sampling [40]. It should be highlighted that there were more examples of success than failure in accessing relevant services. The various statutory and voluntary service providers who supported the study made initial contact with potential participants and a number of practitioners within these services agreed to be interviewed, or they knew of colleagues with a veteran background who could meet the inclusion criteria. The practitioner was given a letter of introduction to the research with an invitation for the person (themselves or offender) to contact the researcher as guided by ethics and by the University of Chester (UoC) [41]. The process of incorporating gate-keepers as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to make the initial contact adheres to the recommendations made by of Seidman (1998) who explains that this has the advantage of not making participants feel coerced into participating in the research and that they remain anonymous to the researcher [22]. Patton (2005) advocates this approach as it ensures that potential participants have formal support in place in case they encounter adverse reactions to telling their life stories [42].

### Interview techniques

When conducting the interviews, the participants were encouraged to provide free flowing accounts through use of prompts. The answers to the questions were probed with carefully phrased questions which were direct but open, thereby limiting vagueness and ambiguity and encouraging elaborated responses. As suggested by Robson (2002), some closed questions were then used to clarify responses and collect specific required information recommends that a very open, casual and friendly demeanour and patience, tact and discretion be utilised [43]. As suggested by Soothill (1999), Bachman, et al. (2013) when participants did converse freely, interviews were frequently permitted to overrun their intended durations, as it was the intention to gather as much data as possible to allow participants to experience the interview process as a 2 way personalised interaction [28,39]. Before and after the interview process, informal conversations sometimes developed about the Armed Forces and their lives in and outside of the CJS, which allowed this researcher to gain an even greater understanding of life for veterans within the CJS. In accordance with Bachman, et al. (2013), this interview method was useful and appropriate for such an exploratory

study and bore results, eliciting apparently detailed, honest, frank and considered responses that produced rich and textured narratives for later analysis [39].

The lead author is a veteran, having served with military, first as a Soldier and later as a Commissioned Officer. The researcher was hesitant about disclosing this point to the offender sub-group as there was a concern that this may appear unmindful of their current situation. However, it was apparent that discussion of military service proceeded a generally opening up of the participants, disarming any reserved demeanour of the participants. As Strauss (1987) explains, this highlights the importance and merits of personal experiences as a source of both insight and ability to build rapport, in order to facilitate effective communication and thus collect high quality data. According to Soothill (1999), Tony Parker advocated the building up of a cordial relationship prior to commencing the main interview, even conducting an initial pre-interview [29]. The point of disclosing past military experience was framed in terms of explaining the researcher's interest in the subject matter and this appeared to be well received by the participants. Wojnar, et al. (2007) explain that the researcher can facilitate the establishment of clarity and empathy for the participant situation by sharing similar life experiences [45]. As suggested by Jorgensen (1989), this process facilitated communication by creating a level conversational dynamic of 2 individuals with shared experiences, rather than an academic researcher interviewing a participant, reducing the social distance between the participant and the researcher [46]. Acronyms, abbreviations and jargon were used throughout the interviews without the need for explanation and most of the participants appeared to come to see the researcher as sharing a veteran identity, routinely including the collective 'we and us' when discussing military service. As espoused by Higate, et al. (2006), this feature allowed the researcher to build a rapport with participants, discuss sensitive issues and explore certain attitudes that otherwise might have been off-limits to non-former military researchers [35]. However, due to this feature within the interviewing process, the lead author determined through reflexivity that a pilot interview would allow this possibility to be explored as well as other variables prior to the commencement of the actual life story interviews.

### **Pilot interview**

The researcher sought to account for individual variations in how potential participants may define themselves as a veteran. The reason for this is that whilst many individuals may meet the definition of a veteran, i.e. 1 day paid service; as highlighted research indicates that a significant proportion did not consider themselves to be veterans [2,47]. Furthermore, this research indicated that definitions used by UK ex-Service personnel did not align with the official British government's definition and public perceptions of what constitutes a "veteran," as there was a tendency to identify the label with a higher age bracket as well as service within the World Wars [47]. Therefore,

the lead author ensured that the terms 'military service' and 'served in the Armed Forces' were included within the participant information pack.

A pilot interview was undertaken before formal data collection took place where one veteran was interviewed using the life story method. Mason (2010) advises that a pilot study or interview should be included within a study's research design, as this will create a crucial opportunity to analyse and review initial findings and to make forward decisions about whether there is a need to reassess the research question [48].

### **Authenticity of verbatim**

When the researcher came to review the participants' transcript, confirmation of military service was conducted through the supporting organisation and open-source research using internet search engines to access publicly held information. This validation of the life story was undertaken in order to safeguard the integrity of the study and ensured that the full sample size of 17 was maintained. Bruner (1987) suggests that life story research can hear the subjective meanings and sense of self and identity being negotiated as the stories unfold, and it must be kept in mind that stories are reconstructions of the person's experiences, remembered and told at a particular point of their lives, to a particular researcher [49]. Bruner (1987) continues that the telling of the story for a particular purpose will have a bearing on how the story is told, which stories are told and how they are presented and therefore interpreted [49]. According to Atkinson (1998) and Frank (1995), within narrative paradigms there is a debate between those who approach stories as a 'window' onto the knowable reality, which can be interpreted by 'experts' and those who view stories as knowledge constructions in their own right [8,50]. As a remit of the submission of the original study, the stories were utilised to explore a perceived reality and link these to academic rigour with an alignment to the selected methodology. However, to achieve this goal, the lead author had to create a relationship with the 17 participants (veterans). This goal as Ellis (2002) recommends, allows the creation of a platform from which to create a standpoint that the personal is the political and likewise the political is personal [51]. Given the current political and legislative review on this subject matter, the political context intersects with the individual whether they are aware of this or not. These stories are offered to illustrate what Scott-Hoy (2002) calls 'a kind of life' and to provide an in-depth, small-scale study that Mair (1989) states can result in 'intimate knowledge' that will provide an insight following analyse that distant knowledge cannot achieve [52,53].

### **Data analysis**

The process of obtaining the life stories consisted of undertaking semi-structured interviews. Within the original study the narratives from the life stories were presented as colour-coded with blue indicating veteran practitioner and green for veteran offender. The life stories were meticulously transcribed and at the end of each interview

the veteran (participant) was asked whether they had any further comments and subsequently their salient points were then recorded.

### Analysis of the life stories

In utilising a thematic approach in analysis, Braun, et al. (2006) insists there are several phases of data analysis [53]. This multi-stage approach as advocated by Braun, et al. (2006) lends itself to a constructionist framework as suggested by Burr (2003) who suggests that this approach would allow for an analyse to include; movement from what is unique to a participant to what is shared amongst participants, to a description of the experience which moves to an interpretation of the experience, commitment to understanding the participant's point of view and lastly,

a focus on personal meaning-making within a particular context [53,54]. The life story interviews post-recording and transcription were analysed within a Braun, et al. (2006) 6-stage model [53]. Smith, et al. (2011) make 2 important points with regard to transcribing interviews. That their analysis of qualitative data focuses primarily on interpreting the meaning of participant's beliefs, and therefore does not require exceptionally detailed reporting regarding pauses, and non-verbal utterances, and secondly that, according to Silverman (2011), it is not worth transcribing information that is irrelevant to the research questions [40]. According to Atkinson (1998), life story research requires a semantic reporting of all words spoken by both researcher and participant in the interviews [8].

**Table 1:** Phases of thematic analysis of the veteran life stories

Phase		Description of the process
1	Familiarisation with the data	Reading and re-reading the life story transcripts, noting initial observations, thoughts and ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Coding pertinent features of importance within the data in a systematic approach across the entire data set (17 life story transcripts).
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all relevant data to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes	Cross referencing themes back against all transcripts (17) and the entire data set, establishing a 'Thematic Map' of the analysis.
5	Refining the thematic map	Close inspection of previous stages to ensure that the Thematic Map provided an explanatory framework consistent with the transcribed life story. Further review, clarification and refinement of the Thematic Map.
6	Writing the analysis	Selecting examples from the data to illustrate the themes and respond to the research question, analysing and interpreting the results by referring back to the research aim and objectives, the literature and life stories.

As the sample for this phase of data analysis is relatively small it was decided that manual examination of the data and recurring themes would be appropriate. The use of NVivo was rejected in line with the recommendations from Silverman (2011) who argues that software programmes for qualitative research are not a substitute for researcher data analysis [40]. Braun, et al. (2006) outline 6 steps to analysing the data and the original study used these as a framework and utilised these steps [53,55] (Table 1).

According to Simons, et al. (2008), the adoption of thematic analysis allows the researcher to ascertain links and patterns between responses, relationships, data and other concepts [56]. Etherington (2008) emphasises a need to be systematic when organising life story themes [57]. The researcher therefore provides a chronological order of all the veterans' stories within the life story trajectories of life before military service, during military service and the period after discharge, creating an aggregated story of all veterans' stories. Etherington (2008) recommends that the focus on these stages of the life story trajectory allows the researcher to undertake the quality assurance process of numerous cycles of questioning, reflecting, rephrasing, theorising, analysing and verifying the data [57]. This process then allows the researcher to create a thematic map to illustrate the emerging main themes and sub-themes as advocated by Braun, et al. (2003) [55].

According to Holstein, et al. (1999) and Josselson, et al. (1999), the researcher was aware that by adopting established life story research methodologies, this study would provide an insight across the length of lives whilst focusing on particular aspects of lived experience [58,59]. However, Atkinson (2007) advise that the researcher should take additional precautions of authenticity of lived experience and to this end, the study utilised external organisations to recruit and validate the backgrounds of participants [8].

### Narrative analysis of the life stories

Riessman (1993) describes narrative analysis as the point at which the investigation is the story itself, and from this stance the reader may understand how participants make sense of the events and actions of their lives [60]. Whilst there are numerous variations of narrative analysis, the approach taken in this study was an analysis that focussed primarily on the meaning and content of the story [40]. As the main purpose of the study was to explore the actual events and experiences encountered by the veterans themselves and recounted within the life stories, the researcher ordered these into a temporal order [61]. Elliott (2005) recommends that this has the added benefit of ensuring that the researchers meaning of the narratives were not being subconsciously imposed [62]. The forming of the stories and their subsequent analysis followed

guidelines suggested by Polkinghorne (2005) [63]. He further stipulated that the researcher should endeavour to consider the context in which the stories took place and the nature of the protagonist; identification of key persons in the protagonist's life, exploration of past events and their impact on the participants present life, structuring the life story to have a beginning, middle and end and finally providing some coherence to the story [63]. As suggested by Silverman (2011), the researcher also created notes after the telling of the stories in order to compare each participants' story and to highlight what could be learnt from the life stories [40].

### **Narrative research methods of life stories**

Elliott (2005) explains that amongst those with an interest in the use of narratives in research, there are 2 different opinions on the relationship between the use of narrative interviews and the internal validity of the information gathered [62]. Researchers such as Mishler (1995) have advocated for use of narrative interviews because they empower the participant to set the agenda and prevent participant experiences from becoming fragmented. According to Riessman (2008), these 2 considerations could be said to highlight the importance that interviews that protect the participant's narratives would produce a story that is more accurate, truthful or trustworthy than structured interviews that ask each participant to a set of standardised questions [9]. The researcher engaged with stakeholders tasked with supporting veterans in order to recruit participants for both veteran sub-groups. This approach enhanced the validity of the life stories by cross checking military service and veteran identity, as well as providing additional support post-interview if required [31]. The deontological philosopher Sir William, et al (1930) argued that the consequences of an action such as lying, may sometimes make lying the right thing to do [64]. Foucault (1970) argued that power relations shape individuals and considers individual identities to be formed through power relations [65]. Furthermore, he stipulated that individuals cannot be determined and comprehended without taking into account the relations of power, which shape them. Foucault (1977) claimed that an individual can be represented as an imaginary particle of the ideological representation of society [66].

"The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an "ideological" representation of society; but he is also a reality fabrication by the specific technology of power that I have called discipline (...) In fact, power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to the production" [66].

In relation to Foucault's writings, it was the interplay and presence of power through the conduit of the interview and the relationship between researcher and participant that produced the reality of the life story, the truth held within and the production of knowledge on the lives of veterans in the CJS. In order to mediate the power relations, the researcher utilised an approach adopted by Tony Parker,

in which time was spent with the participant prior to the actual interview in order build a relationship and establish trust [28]. This approach used by Tony Parker allowed him to engage with participants ranging from Death Row Inmates, Lighthouse Keepers to a veteran entangled and mismanaged by the CJS. Within the introductory phase of the interviews, the researcher undertook discussions on military life with the participants (veterans), as this allowed for verification on truth as well as acknowledging a shared identity. In accordance with the evidence produced by Kennedy, et al. (1996), this procedure would formulate an empathetic process between researcher and participant on the basis of shared identity [67]. Within a recent study conducted by the author the value of the shared veteran identity was evident as a therapeutic alliance to support recovery through the utilisation of non-pharmaceutical interventions such as the use of horticulture therapy as demonstrated with the Welsh veteran's charity Woody's Lodge [68]. The lead author also demonstrated how the use of psychosocial interventions could assist in the reclamation of identity and a sense of belonging for those veterans with substance misuse and addictions [69]. Similarly, he demonstrated that life story proved crucial in bringing the veterans stories to fruition and establishing new insights. Elliott (2005) advocates the use of life story research as participants never simply report experiences, but rather they try to make sense of those experiences as best they can through developing an individualised life story [62]. The authors of this article support the belief held by Elliott (2005) that a crucial reason to adopt this life story approach is that the focus is on the participants' (both veteran sub-groups) subjective interpretations and the meanings that they make of their lives through lived experience of addictions and substance misuse behaviours [62].

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined how the veterans (participants) were identified and recruited into this research study. The reader has been introduced to a review of the research methods and strategy that have allowed for a systematic justification for the inclusion of the selected data collection, data generation and data analysis methods. The success in locating participants within both veteran sub-groups was possible through engaging with various stakeholders before the data collection stage commenced. The success of locating the participants (veterans) was the result of the genuine enthusiasm displayed by the persistent and dynamic practitioners tasked with supporting veterans before (diversion), during and after contact with the CJS. The lead authors identity as a veteran created trust and camaraderie with both sub-groups as a non-judgmental approach was adopted throughout the life story interview process. Whilst he did not have lived experience of addictions and substance misuse, his former military identity and his role as a mental health nurse allowed him to broach the sensitive topic of addictions and substance misuse with an understanding of the stigma and shame that maybe associated with the presence of these mental health

problems.

Within the narratives there was evidence of gambling addiction, this will be explored in a subsequent publication. This article has provided a strategic framework for the application of a methodological approach that utilises emancipatory research to sensitively explore the health care needs of a camouflaged sub-group exposed to the CJS and recovering from addictions and substance misuse.

### Ethical Considerations

The research study ensured that the Code of Ethics applied by the lead authors University was strictly adhered and followed the guidance as set out within the Code of Practice for Research. This ensured that this research drew on a number of ethical frameworks to ensure rigour in the development of its methodology and to protect the veterans (participants) and lead author from potentially harmful conduct. Jones (2012) explains that research that involves people can create a potential for negative consequences including harm that can be avoided through the use of ethical principles. The research study adopts the University of Chester's Code of Ethics and the Code of Practice for Research in order to upholding the veteran's rights, dignity, safety and wellbeing, through methods of informed consent, confidentiality, data protection, and protecting their right to withdraw. Through the use of reflexivity, the lead author himself decided that some veterans (offenders) would not be approached on the basis that they were going through a difficult transitional phase from a custodial sentence to re-entering into a civilian life. This included those that were currently involved in detox, rehabilitation or who were in a process of relapse within their recovery journey. The lead author wishes to highlight that for most individuals (86%) leaving the Armed Forces, the transition into civilian life is without difficulty and they obtain employment which consequently allows for a positive contribution to society.

### Ethical Approval

This research study was submitted to the University of Chester's Faculty of Health and Social Care Research Ethics Committee and was judged to be ethically robust and permission was granted to commence the data collection phase by a team of independent academics. There was a requirement to create a lone worker plan to address the need to review and maintain the personal safety of the lead author. As he had previous military experience as it was deemed necessary to ensure that the concept of reflexivity is addressed in order to address the possibility of biased results.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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