Soldiering On: Resilience and Protective Factors in the Post-9/11 U.S. Army Veteran

Cohort's Civilian Transition

David Smith, MA, LMHCA, SUDPT

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Committee Page

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Nikki Johnson, PsyD, Northwest University

Dissertation Committee Member: Dr. Jenny Harris, PhD, Northwest University

Dissertation Committee Member: Dr. Tony Pizelo, Ph.D, Northwest University

Abstract

This qualitative dissertation employs Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate the lived experiences of post-9/11 Army veterans and explore the intricate dynamics of resiliency and protective factors influencing their transition to civilian life. The study aims to uncover the nuanced meanings embedded in veterans' narratives, shedding light on the factors contributing to or hindering their ability to navigate the challenges associated with post-military life.

The research design involves in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of post-9/11 Army veterans. Through the lens of IPA, the study seeks to capture these veterans' rich and multifaceted experiences, emphasizing their subjective interpretations of resiliency and the protective elements that have played pivotal roles in their post-service lives.

Key themes to be explored include the impact of combat exposure, the role of social support networks, the significance of educational and vocational pursuits, the influence of mental health awareness, and the intersectionality of identity in shaping resiliency.

By employing IPA, the research aims to offer a holistic understanding of the lived experiences of post-9/11 Army veterans and provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of factors contributing to their resiliency.

The findings of this dissertation are anticipated to inform support programs, policies, and interventions tailored to the unique needs of post-9/11 Army veterans, enhancing the overall well-being and successful reintegration of this distinct cohort into civilian life.

Keywords: post-9/11 veterans, resiliency, protective factors, civilian transition, interpretive phenomenological analysis, combat exposure, social support, education, mental health awareness, identity

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

The Post 9/11 cohort of military veterans consists of men and women who enlisted in the military after September 2001. A military veteran is considered by the Title 38 of the Code of Regulations to be an individual who served in an active military compacity and was honorably discharged, or relieved of their service by means less than dishonorable. By the year 2016, the veteran populace had grown to 4.2 million with 2.9 million of those being active in at least one stage of the War on Terror (Barr et al. 2019). The Department of Veteran Affairs anticipated that the veteran populace would continue to grow and in the year 2021, military veterans would total 5.9 million, with approximately 78% having served during wartime and 22% during peacetime (Schaefer, 2021).

The War on Terror is divided into theaters or stages of operations. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) refers to the beginning phase of the United States' presence in Afghanistan in response to the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks on American soil. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) is the title of the military's operations to liberate Iraq from terrorism. This stage of the conflict took place from 2003 to 2011. Operation New Dawn (OND) is the title that replaced the OIF after the year 2014. These conflicts took longer than expected to be resolved and led to the death and suffering of hundreds of thousands of soldiers who participated. Soldiers watched their colleagues killed, maimed, tortured, or captured as prisoners of war. Experiences like these leave an adverse psychological impact on soldiers.

This research aims to gain further detailed insight into the resiliency, protective factors, and strengths of the qualities and characteristics of post-9/11 veterans. In the present study, I intend to investigate the internal strengths and protective factors intrinsic to the post-9/11 cohort.

By focusing on the individual experiences of these post-9/11 military veterans as told by them, the hope is to identify the characteristics and qualities of individuals, military organizations, and other support systems so that there can be an extensive focus on empowering and encouraging veterans to identify and utilize both internal and systemic resources for their benefit.

Background

As many soldiers conclude their enlistment service, they face challenges when reintegrating into the civilian lifestyle. According to McNally & Frueh, approximately 13-20% of returning post-9/11 veterans will receive a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Mcnally & Frueh, 2013). A PTSD diagnosis and disability rating by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) due to service-connected experience/injury is the third most assigned compensation claim given to a post-9/11 veteran (Department of Veteran Affairs Veterans Benefits Administration, 2012).

Additionally, there is a correlation between a diagnosis of PTSD and veteran suicide due to shame playing a central role in suicidal ideation within the context of PTSD (Cunningham et. al, 2019). Braswell and Kushner (2012) discussed the rise in completed suicide in the active-duty military, though the more commonly known and reported statistics are those of veteran suicides. Reports indicate that approximately 22 military veterans die by way of suicide every day, regardless of the current efforts of the military and VA (Cerel et al., 2015; Kirch, 2014). Research indicates that the veteran populace under the age of 35 has the highest likelihood of completing suicide (Huguet et al., 2014). When considering the entire military veteran population, the post-9/11 cohort is the youngest and least likely to engage in the utilization of

psychological services, even medical services offered by the VA, when compared to other veteran cohorts (Garcia, 2014; Jakupcak et al., 2014).

Impact of Research and Development on Veteran Groups

The United States has been involved in every major war or conflict in modern history (Martin, K. 2022). Participation in these events has provided an opportunity for extensive research to be conducted increasing the understanding of the traumatic imprints war and combat leave on veterans. Since the year 2001, researchers have had the unique opportunity to compare multiple veteran groups to one another, learning the differences in military culture, bias, strengths, challenges and so on. Fontanta and Rosenheck (2008) compared the post-9/11 veteran group to the Vietnam and World War II cohorts and were able to find significant variations. Approximately 47% of post-9/11 veterans indicated that their transition into the civilian world was somewhat or very difficult, compared to pre-9/11 cohorts where only 21% indicated transitional difficulties (Parker et al., 2019). Social and political climates such as economic recession and recovery were influential in veterans' reintegration. Nearly a third of veterans identifying difficulties with finding employment, and 30% of overall veterans receiving unemployment benefits (Parker et al., 2019).

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States has invested exponentially in research and development (R&D), revolutionizing technological advancement in biological sciences, engineering, and medical and computer sciences costing approximately $80 billion in 2001 (McGeary & Smith, 2001). According to the National Science Board, the U.S. R&D budget reached $407 billion in 2010, and $667 billion in 2019 (Boroush & Guci, 2022). The growth in funding has allowed for advancements that have a direct effect on the effectiveness and

proficiency of both wartime strategy and soldiers. Advancements in technology have allowed

conflicts to be conducted in more than just man-on-man combat. There have been innovations

and improvements in body and vehicular armor, communications, robotics, cyberwarfare, missile

guidance systems, and other weapons technologies (Greenemeier, 2011).

Military service members and veterans all experience great benefits from the R&D of

medical technologies, which have increased the speed an individual can receive medical

interventions, both in and out of combat. Due to these changes, there is now an increased

prognosis for soldiers who have been injured (Olenick et al., 2015). The military's effectiveness

has risen in response time and medical interventions options, and according to the U.S. Army

Surgeon General, 92% of soldiers who have been injured from the post-9/11 cohort have

returned home, even though there have continued advancements made in weapon technologies

and combat strategies resulting in substantial injuries. (Vergun, 2016). It was best put by Howard

and Colleagues (2019) who said, "The only winner in war is medicine." It is unfortunate that

many military medical advancements are connected to the act of war and conflict (Baker 2012).

The post-9/11 veteran demographic was found to be younger and show greater diversity

regarding gender, culture, race, and ethnicity. Specifically, there is a higher ratio of Latinx and a

reduced number of African American service members (Fontanta & Rosenheck, 2008). The post-

9/11 cohort is the most diverse military cohort in American history, with the projected continued

reduction in overall enlisted members and increased female and underrepresented group

enlistment (Schaeffer, 2021).

Civilian-Military Gap

In recent years social norms have developed to be more open and accepting of diversity and change, working toward social cohesion (Arant et al., 2021). Given the differences between civilian life and military culture, many are concerned about the growing "civil-military gap" and the effect it has on the military enlisted, their families, the military's mission, and reintegration after service (Hillen, 1994; Ulrich, 2021). Civil-Military relations are known as the negotiation between the military and civilians, and the civilian government (Owen, 2011). The Civil-Military Gap is the disconnect between both governing bodies. The gap perpetuates a lack of understanding where veterans feel as if they don't belong and are isolated from society, and civilians struggle to understand the military and the experiences of those who serve (Ricks, 1997). Hillen (1994) discussed the need for a gap to maintain the functional imperatives and virtues of duty, honor, patriotism, courage, discipline, commitment, strength, integrity, trust, and resolve, which have been developed over many centuries to enhance performance and encourage success in the military mission and purpose; and that the adaptation of social imperatives would jeopardize military culture. The gap should not be closed but managed (Hillen, 1994). Ulrich (2021) purposes the development of more comprehensive programs which would create opportunities to blend the principles of military service between civilian and military systems. Examples of effective collaboration include using social and news media to communicate understanding of value systems and encourage relationships; academic research allows growth and knowledge in both civil and military functions to increase communication which influence decision and policy-making; and the expansion of early education/preparatory programs like the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) (Ulrich, 2021). There is a need for military

culture adaptation to avoid a potential conflict between civil and military norms and to address the needs of soldiers and veterans.

Pietrzak and colleagues (2012) reviewed research of 18 longitudinal studies examining the effects of military deployment on mental health outcomes. It was found that deployment itself was not a significant influence, in fact, in some instances, mental health symptoms, such as anxiety and depression symptoms improved during deployment. This indicated that combat exposure, not deployment in general, had an adverse effect on mental health (Pietrzak et al., 2012). There is no clear evidence that deployment has a direct negative influence on soldiers' and veterans' mental health.

Interestingly, Chopik et al. (2020) sampled 212,386 soldiers leaving for deployment, examining their positive personality characteristics. After completion of their deployment, the same assessment was conducted three times periodically. Results indicated two classes, namely resilient and declining. Of this sample, approximately 40% were within the declining class. The declining class experienced more negative mental health symptoms and made minimal gains over time. The resilient class exhibited high levels of character strengths which acted as a protective factor against mental illness, showing very few changes during and post-deployment (Chopik et al., 2020). There are certain aspects of deployment that are predictive and, by their nature, have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of soldiers and veterans such as military chain of command, being away from home, and the deterioration of marital/significant other relationships (Newby et al., 2005; Meadows et al., 2017).

In addition, demographic variables such as gender identity and race, when crossed with traumatic experiences, show variability in the presentation of mental health symptoms. The four

most common demographic reasons for discrimination in the military among those enlisted were gender identity/expression at 83%, having a masculine or feminine appearance at 79%, sexual orientation at 68%, and biological sex at 57%. These reasons correlated disproportionately with symptoms of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidality when compared to cisgender military service members (Reisner et al., 2016; Holloway et al., 2021). A study conducted by Seal and colleagues (2007) found an exponential likelihood for males to develop PTSD related to combat exposure when deployed compared to females (Seal et al., 2007). Additionally, other research has indicated that female veterans have a higher risk of experiencing depression at nearly 48% compared to males at 14% (Haskell et al., 2010; Hoglund & Shawartz, 2014). Vogt et al. (2011), however, presented research showing there to be no difference between males and females, and that they share the same likelihood of developing and experiencing mental health symptoms (Vogt et al., 2011). It is worth noting, Hogland and Shawartz (2014) discovered that females who have been deployed had the highest risk of developing or experiencing mental health symptoms when compared to male veterans who were deployed, male and female veterans who were not deployed, and civilians of both genders. (Hoglund & Shawartz, 2014).

Mental Health Challenges

Military service personnel have historically played a critical role in understanding mental health diagnoses, and furthering research and psychological interventions. The post-9/11 cohort of military veterans has participated in an immense amount of research which has provided much insight into many mental health conditions, specifically PTSD (Hoge et al., 2006; Seal et al., 2010). There are many roles and responsibilities a service member may have while enlisted, these are known as one's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The nature of a soldier's MOS

can increase the likelihood that a servicemember is exposed to traumatic or difficult experiences.

For example, soldiers who serve in the military under a direct combat MOS have the highest

likelihood of developing PTSD when compared to those in a combat support MOS (Xue et al.,

2015). Koren et al. (2005) also noted that soldiers who sustained a combat-related injury were

more likely to develop PTSD than their counterparts who were present but sustained no injury.

The development of PTSD is further understood when examining a veteran who is experiencing

"survivor's guilt." Those who experience this guilt and shame, often experienced by a veteran

who endures an incident where there is a loss of someone they had a close connection with, show

a correlation with developing PTSD symptoms (Oketdalen et al., 2014). In conjunction with

survivor's guilt, military service members and veterans are often placed in situations and

environments where they may have to make choices against their personal values, morals, or

ethics, increasing the possibility of moral injury. When a moral injury is present, the individual's

ability to cope with choices made and adjust after combat and deployment are affected (Currier

et al., 2015). Moral Injury is shown to have a direct impact on mental health symptoms and

diagnoses such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and increases the risk of suicidality (Koenig et al.,

2019).

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Also recognized as "shell shock" or "fight fatigue," PTSD can result from observing or

facing (immediately or incidentally) a life-threatening event and is not always constrained to

veterans. PTSD is a combination of signs and symptoms that vary in severity across time.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), PTSD is based upon four

symptom classes: intrusive signs and symptoms, avoidance of reminders, negative alterations to mood and cognition, and arousal and reactivity signs and symptoms (Morgan et al., 2017).

Schein et al., (2021) conducted research in exploring the prevalence of PTSD symptoms in the United States. There were differences between the military and civilian population's PTSD symptom duration. Civilian PTSD rates span from 8% to 56.7%, measuring symptoms again at 1-year PTSD symptoms remain at 2.3% to 9.1%, with symptoms lasting throughout the lifetime at 3.4% to 26.9%. In the military population, rates of PTSD symptoms prevalence span from 1.2% to 87.5%, and one year later, PTSD symptoms measure at 6.7% to 50.2%, with a lifetime rate of symptoms duration at 7.7% to 17.0% (Schein et al., 2021). Sexual assault has the highest rates for PTSD among civilians (Dworkin, et al., 2021). Even though sexual assault is present in the military, the leading cause for PTSD in military populations is combat-related (Kintzle et al., 2018). PTSD is regularly correlated with "traumatic brain injury (TBI), military sexual trauma (MST), sleep troubles, substance use, pain, and different psychiatric disorders, and calls for a complete evaluation." (Miles et al., 2021).

The VA/DOD clinical practice guidelines encourage a mental health professional to assume a patient-centered approach to address the individual's needs and establish treatment goals. An emphasis is placed on collaboration with the patient who is encouraged to take an active role in participating in the treatment process. The VA/DOD has integrated a collaborative care model, which is shown to increase patient compliance with treatment, improve satisfaction, and reduce early termination rates (Card, 2018) which is critical provided the post-9/11 cohort shows a lower satisfaction rate for therapeutic interventions when compared to older veteran cohorts who have participated in psychological treatment (Fontanta & Rosenheck, 2008).

Comprehensive diagnostic evaluations are conducted to provide a thorough understanding of the

patient's lived experience and symptoms. The earlier the detection of PTSD symptoms and

intervention for said symptoms occur, the higher the likelihood of symptom reduction, and in

some cases, completely diminished symptoms. The VA/DOD has favored evidence-based

interventions that have been thoroughly researched through the utilization of randomized control

trials and trauma-focused interventions. Other alternative treatments can be used to address

PTSD symptoms; however, they are not the primary intervention. The primary means of

treatment utilized by the VA/DOD are Cognitive Processing Therapy, Prolonged Exposure, and

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (Card, 2018). In conjunction with therapeutic

interventions, pharmacological interventions are used to decrease mental health and somatic

symptoms and support the individual in creating internal stability and a subsequent likelihood of

success in treatment.

Suicide

With 19 to 22 veterans completing suicide every day, threat evaluations and interventions

are paramount (Cushing et al., 2018). Private and public health care specialists should be aware

of patients' military history and capable of comprehending suicide-threat factors, regardless of

age (Vogt et al., 2020). Young veterans aged 18–35 are considered to be the most vulnerable to

suicide, yet numerous researchers observed that even older veterans, aged 55 years and older,

have been near twice as likely (70% and 38%) to commit suicide as nonveterans (Logan et al.,

2016). Additionally, 11% of veterans who live through their primary suicide attempt will try to

commit suicide again inside 9 months, unfortunately 6% of these will not survive (Logan et al.,

2016). The VA has discovered that validation of a veteran's efforts during safety planning

improved the efficacy of health care structures in reducing veterans' attempts at suicide (Green et al., 2018).

There is a strong correlation between PTSD and suicidality, which is ever present within the post-9/11 military cohort, having a higher risk for suicidal ideation, attempts, and completion (Zuromski et al., 2014). Post-9/11 students/veterans have continued to experience high levels of psychological distress, and those that experienced combat-related traumas report higher PTSD symptoms and increased substance use (Barry et al., 2012). In addition to PTSD and suicidality, there are many post-9/11 veterans who utilize the VA medical services for the diagnosis and treatment of other mental health issues such as depression (Davis et al., 2014).

Depression

Depressive symptoms and diagnoses are the most prevalent reason for veterans to report to the VA for medical care (Brody et al., 2018). Approximately 14% of veterans receiving care from the VA are diagnosed with depression, and one-third experience depressive symptoms (Trivedi et al., 2015). An important distinction noted by the National Mental Health Alliance (2016) was that people diagnosed with PTSD have been much less likely to commit suicide than people with depression by13.7% (Pietrzak et al., 2017), probably because of the increasing recognition of PTSD (Blakey et al., 2018). However, veterans with a dual diagnosis of PTSD and Major Depression Disorder (MDD) show an increased risk of suicidality, lowest quality of life, and mental health functioning (Nichter et al., 2019). Depression is not only positively linked with suicidal ideation, but also is correlated with increased physical health problems, sleep disorders, and risk of death (Ziven et al., 2015).

Substance use Disorders

Substance Use Disorders (SUD) are a growing concern within the military and veteran culture (Lan et al., 2016). The stressors of military culture increase veterans' risk of developing a dependency on substances such as liquor, tobacco, and drugs. Research has indicated that U.S. veterans typically have a higher percentage of individuals qualifying for substance use disorders when compared to civilian populations; however, due to increased efforts and awareness, there has become a decrease in veteran substance use over the past 20 years (Lan et al., 2016). Seal and colleagues indicated that approximately 10.5% of male military veterans and 4.5% of female military veterans currently meet diagnostic criteria for Alcohol Use Disorder (Seal et al., 2010). Other research has indicated that post-9/11 veterans with SUD are three to four times more likely to develop PTSD, suggesting approximately 63% of post-9/11 veterans with and SUD also have experienced PTSD (Teeters et al., 2017). According to the VA, veterans who have a co-occurring diagnosis of SUD and PTSD make up approximately 20% of veterans utilizing the VA services, and only approximately one-third of those seek treatment. Due to their substance use, the post-9/11 cohort is at substantial risk for associated issues such as homelessness, unemployment, and increased physical health barriers (Betancourt et al., 2021).

Physical Health Challenges

Traumatic Brain Injury

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is defined as "a traumatically precipitated structural damage and physiological disruption of mind characteristic due to an outside force" (Blyth & Bazarian, 2010). A TBI may be categorized as mild, moderate, or intense, depending on the period of unconsciousness, reminiscence loss/disorientation, and responsiveness of the character following

the event, specifically understanding verbal commands and communicate appropriate response

(Blakey et al., 2018). Donnelly et al. (2018) discussed the effects of TBI on military veterans 18-

41 months after the incident. Results indicated that in a sample of 500 post-9/11 veterans, 44%

had sustained a TBI related to military service. The majority, 97% of these veterans, had

sustained a mild grade TBI; however, there was still substantial psychological distress,

specifically in the cognitive functioning domains (Donnelly et al., 2018). In research conducted

by retired colonel Thakur and colleagues (2020), in a sample of 1,339,937 military veterans

using VA services from the years 1994 – 2014, approximately 8% (106,792) had comorbidity of

TBI and PTSD diagnoses and symptoms, and 7% (110,789) with TBI alone. In a study

examining the effects of TBI on PTSD and sleep apnea in a VA sample (N=602), 32% endorsed

having sleep apnea. There was a significant correlation between sleep apnea and PTSD

symptoms ($p<.001$), and TBI and PTSD ($p<.05$), indicating that PTSD, TBI, and sleep apnea are

often comorbid (Miles et al., 2021).

Chronic Pain

Almost 83% of post 9/11 veterans have reported persistent pain, making accessible

prognosis and treatment essential. The most frequently experienced physical pain reported is

musculoskeletal distress due to the high demands of training and mission readiness (Molloy et

al., 2020). A complete evaluation of pain is crucial, with a comprehensive assessment of both

physiological/organic and mental components being critical when considering that "persistent

bodily pain is frequently related to co-morbid conditions, which includes TBI and PTSD, which

could complicate remedy" (Metraux et al., 2017). There is a complicated overlay of experience

with mental health diagnoses such as depression and PTSD, and TBI known as polytrauma

(Sayer et al., 2008). Polytrauma is explained by the VA as multiple injuries to various body parts including internal organs (Armstrong et al., 2019). For example, a veteran who sustained a TBI in addition to physical trauma, such as amputation in conjunction with PTSD, would have polytrauma. Treatment of post-9/11 veterans needs to be cognizant of PTSD and its correlations with chronic pain. In addition, it is imperative to address the veterans' evaluations and perceptions of control of self and cognitive distortions (Otis et al., 2010). According to Wand and Colleagues (2016), chronic pain is positively associated with an altered state of beliefs regarding oneself and abilities, having a negative effect on efficacy and worth. Furthermore, these self-perceptions correlate positively with the intensity of pain and disability leading to psychological distress, catastrophizing, and avoidance patterns (Wand et al, 2016). Additionally, it is necessary to monitor the usage of opioids in the treatment of pain to reduce the likelihood of developing a SUD.

Homelessness

National Center for Homeless Veterans observed that 52% of homeless veterans have disabilities, 50% are afflicted by a mental diagnosis, and 70% have SUDs (Metraux et al., 2017). It is envisioned that about 48,935 veterans are dispossessed and constitute about 11% of the homeless population (Tsai et al., 2021). From the years of 2007-2017, the VA homeless service showed a 27% increase in resource utilization for veterans under the age of 55 (Tsai et al., 2021). Almost 14% of homeless veterans face problems such as substance use, unemployment, and intellectual illness; but are plagued with the extra burdens of military services related factors, "including PTSD, TBI, records of more than one deployment, and army competencies that will not be transferable to the civilian paintings environment" (Metraux et al., 2017).

Amputations

Advancements in science and physical safety have permitted more infantry personnel to survive after injury compared to survival rates from preceding wars. However, between the years 2009 and 2019, the number of veterans receiving amputations has risen by 36% (Webster, 2020). The scars from an amputation are deep, and many post-9/11 veterans have increased challenges with mental health and wellness due to precipitated outcomes associated with their amputation. It was noted that "in instances concerning more than one limb amputations or disfigurement, veterans have increased challenges with many social and employment barriers" (Vogt et al., 2020). Webster et al. (2020) reported that as of 2019, there have been 96,519 post-9/11 veterans who have sought care from the VA for amputation, and 46,214 of those had a minimum of one major limb amputation (Webster et al., 2020). Health care experts must be capable of dealing with the unique physical health concerns of veterans and encourage both mental and physical fitness post-amputation. Sensual aids, prostheses, and scientific rehabilitation need an interdisciplinary-group method in the recuperation of injured military service members and veterans. Webster (2019) discussed the importance of communicating issues that will be prevalent in early recovery. There should be an increased awareness and communication of future struggles that may develop later and possibly worsen over time. According to Sahu et al. (2016), there is an increased likelihood of post-amputation psychiatric disorders such as PTSD (3.3%-56.3%), depression (14%-92%), and phantom limb syndrome (14%-92).

Hazardous exposures

Veterans who have been exposed to chemicals (i.e., Agent Orange), radiation, air contaminants, conflict agents, excessive noise, and other occupational dangers experience an

increased threat of health and wellness challenges, even years after exposure (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). For example, long-term health troubles were implicated in affiliation with Agent Orange in Vietnam veterans. For post-9/11 military veterans that served in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is concern over the long-time term impact of various pollutants, including the use of "burn pits" which were commonly used before 2009 to dispose of all matters of waste, both toxic and non-toxic. The emissions from burn pits were filled with harmful chemicals such as "dioxins, furans, lead, mercury, volatile organic compounds, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons" (Liu et al., 2016). Exposure to such harmful chemicals over the first 9 years of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan have given large cause for concern as veterans report and experiences long-term respiratory illness such as "asthma, bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and constrictive bronchiolitis" (Sharkey et al., 2016). According to the Disabled American Veterans (DAV, 2007), millions of military service members and veterans were potentially subjected to toxins, chemicals, and human waste. In 2007, the DAV created a preliminary registry which was adopted by the VA in 2014 to assist in the identification and care of affected veterans (Coughlin & Szema., 2019). Obtaining correct scientific and deployment records is crucial in offering a correct prognosis and suitable treatment. (Lawrence et al., 2019)

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Numerous veterans have a difficult time readjusting back into military culture after being separated due to rehabilitation. The military has physical ability tests that are standardized and have left little room for flexibility compared to civilian counterparts and alternatives/accommodations offered for those that are disabled or in rehabilitation, especially

considering if there is a veteran who rendered disabled and has a combat-associated mental

health disorder. Reintegration care is geared toward stability of vocational, bodily, social, and

intellectual treatment plans to apply to veterans for re-access into civilian existence (Lawrence et

al., 2019). Vocational packages assist job-in search of veterans to broaden abilities and

understanding required for a selected job. Physical rehabilitation makes a special effort to

enhance veterans' quality of life and foster independence. Communal rehabilitation supports

veterans to integrate to non-army existence and set up new approaches of existence, post-

deployment. Psychological rehabilitation addresses cognitive impairments and seeks to increase

functioning and cognitive capacity to address their mental health needs, such as loss of identity,

stigma, pain, and isolation in a new environment (McGill et al., 2019).

Military/Veteran Culture

Recognizing that every military conflict and era has a different set of social, political, and

individual norms and challenges, it is important to see how these characteristics affect a specific

cohorts. Culture is defined as the attitudes, belief systems, and collective values of a group; but is

not restricted to sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or age (Sue & Sue 2012).

Cano et al. (2015), built on the definition of culture with the addition of an understanding of how

the culture develops, changes, and adapts through acculturation and enculturation. Acculturation

and enculturation are two concepts that are typically discussed regarding underrepresented ethnic

and racial groups; however, these concepts should be considered regarding the collectivist

culture of the military, with the additional understanding that each branch of service has its own

culture, mission, and purpose (Redmond, 2015). Acculturation is the assimilation of the enlisted

service member into the dominant military culture, transforming one's personal beliefs to adopt

those of the dominant military culture. Enculturation is the process of traditions, practices, and

values of the dominant culture being lived and practiced in the service member's life to be

accepted or made a part of the group. Military culture influences the servicemember's personal

norms, themes, and perspectives (Sooters et al., 2006). Navijit (2020) discussed the uniqueness

of military culture being highly defined by structure and regulations which are to be self-

regulatory in the daily lives of the enlisted, and in many cases the lives of their family members

(Navijit, 2020). Military culture is based on collectivist ideals and values often focusing on

"something bigger than themselves" mission first and camaraderie are priority over the

individual desires of a person (McCormick et. al, 2019). Military service members place a value

on training, becoming the best they can be, and holding themselves and others to a higher

standard.

Post-9/11 military veterans have agreed that the struggles with the transition into civilian

life are exasperated by the gap in understanding of military cultures, both by professionals and

civilians (Pease et al., 2016). Brim (2013) expressed that military values are the structure and

guidelines that promote the collective identity of service members. Many of these same values

and cultural norms are carried on through the individual veteran's life after military enlistment

(Brim 2013). However, Storm et al. (2012) asserted that there is a distinction between the active-

duty military culture and veteran culture. Understanding the differences between the military and

veteran culture may provide insight into the socialization and acceptance components of

transition (Reger et al., 2008).

Military tradition is based on an authoritarian and hierarchical organizational approach

that focuses on its uniqueness, separating itself when compared to other social organizations

(Hall, 2013) through its ideals, organizational structure, framework, and rules (Redmond., 2015).

Understanding one or several aspects of military culture does not equate to cultural competency.

Often, separating from other nonmilitary organizations and influences, ensures a cohesive

identity for service members to fully immerse in the military's specific order, structure, and way

of life. Enlisted members have focused on proficiency and effectiveness of their assigned duties

to ensure a mission's success, which is often vastly different from the daily goals and tasks of

civilians. (Redmond et al., 2015).

In a qualitative study conducted by McCormick and colleagues, post-9/11 veterans

discussed three main categories of military culture: individual, relational, and systemic character.

Individual character is based on the presence of patriotism/service to the country, honor/integrity,

discipline/hard work, pride, courage/confront mortality, and mission first/overcome adversity.

These qualities allow veterans to value their service, maintaining the connection to something

greater than themselves. Relational Character is understood as communicated camaraderie.

Camaraderie is more than a value. It is part of the veteran identity, to put aside differences and

focus on the responsibility to one another and work together to support each other, and overall

complete the mission. Lastly, Systemic Character is portrayed as order, structure, training, and

generational differences (McCormick et al., 2019). In this same study, McCormick and

colleagues provided insight into three veteran categories of cultural experience: personal

struggle, personal growth, and limited communications. Personal struggle is understood as

disparate from civilian culture and includes interpersonal difficulties, marriage, and divorce. The

second veteran set of experience is personal growth, which encompasses continuity of military

culture, appreciation of cultural support for the military, altered existential values, and improved

personal relationships. Lastly, limited communications are the notion that civilians do not

understand, "I do not talk about my military experiences." This belief often gives a sense of

limited sources for help as veterans feel they only connect with other veterans or specific mental

health professionals (McCormick et al., 2019).

Stigma

Stigma is another barrier to the mental health of war veterans. DeViva et al. (2016),

found that among military populations, perceived stigma regarding mental health is increased

when compared to civilian populations. Stigma is categorized into two forms, public, and self-

stigma. Public stigmas are the external negative influences that are perceived by the veteran

(Corrigan, 2004; Vogel et al., 2011); whereas self-stigma refers to internalization of external

influences and the veteran's perceptions of themselves align with the public's stigma resulting in

a sense of guilt, blame, and inferiority (Vogel, et al. 2011). Stigma may result from one's

identification with a specific group such as in their religious affiliation, race, ethnicity, or

ideology. The primary stigma within the military population and culture regards mental health

(Cornish et al., 2014). Stigma affects veterans in various ways. Veterans avoid seeking

professional help because the first step to healing would be to accept their situation and reframe

their perspective as a means of healing, which would compel them to relive or share their

traumatic past (Vogt et al., 2009).Additionally, they feel that counselors would sympathize with

their situation or pity them (Cogan et al., 2021).

Many veterans believe that seeking medical intervention for mental health concerns is

weak and unstable (Cogan et al., 2021). They would rather brave their mental illness and find a

coping mechanism such as drug and alcohol use than admit to or address their experiences. The

social perception of soldiers being healthy people affects them emotionally and influences their

decision not to seek professional support for mental health issues. The government has initiated a

deliberate effort to challenge this stigma and have soldiers accept that anyone can suffer from

depression or mental illness. Bogaers and colleagues (2020) found that despite social and cultural

influences and resources, military personnel are still hesitant to engage in therapeutic

interventions due to stigma, fearing negative career outcomes, social rejection, and concerns with

confidentiality (Bogaers et al., 2020).

Medication

Medication as a treatment option is a significant barrier for many veterans seeking help.

Many soldiers and veterans have anxiety about the use of psychotropic medications (Goode &

Swift, 2019). It is a common projection from the individual that taking medications for mental

diagnoses is evidence of weakness. Additionally, Mohamed and Rosenheck (2008) discussed

that the VA has a system of prescribing diagnostic and symptom-targeted medications such as

antipsychotics, antidepressants, and anxiolytics/sedative-hypnotics. Unfortunately, many

psychotropic drugs also have adverse side effects, which are an additional contributor to

medication disapproval. This class of medications can alter emotion, one's mind, or behavior

(Mohamed & Rosenheck 2008). These side effects are undesirable and discouraging to many

veterans as they can affect their daily activities and make them feel sick.

Krystal et al. (2017) advocated for a renewal of resources for adequate treatment of

PTSD; being that PTSD is the fifth most prevalent disorder in the United States and

pharmacological treatments are ineffective, having a direct impact on all aspects of a client's life

such as physical health, social, and self-identity contexts (Krystal et al., 2017). Instead, many

veterans prefer therapy when compared to psychopharmacological interventions (McHugh et al.,

2013), even though it may still be perceived as a sign of weakness, perhaps it is easier to compartmentalize in the daily life habits and schedules of veterans and be more open to therapy, especially if the therapist is a veteran themselves (Johnson et al., 2018). There is comfort in knowing counselors and psychologists provide veterans with the ability to establish and change traumatic thought patterns that cause PTSD or depression (Rose and Harb, 2014).

Post-9/11 Veteran in the Workforce

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, more than 17 million veterans reside in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Despite employment challenges, many are operating as professionals or business owners. Unemployment for veterans has been declining in recent years (Prudential, 2012). According to the Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Veteran unemployment rates as of August 2022 are 2.4 percent, and year previous it was 3.6 percent, and in 2015 it was 5 percent (bls.gov). In the 2021 annual report of the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council reports indicate nearly 40,000 veterans have found employment through the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program. Additionally, the American Job Center service has enrolled approximately 600,000 veterans into the employment skills workshops which has effectively led to employment opportunities (fedshirevets.gov). The unemployment decline is in part due to the strengthening economy between the years of 2010-2020; however, an important element is that prospective employers are beginning to hire veterans as they understand the strengths they can bring to the workforce. University of Massachusetts Global Career Development Center discussed how military service members and veterans are discharged from the military with talents and abilities that are transferable and applicable throughout many different industries. Veterans have qualities such as flexibility,

decision-making, out-of-the-box thinking, preparedness, teamwork and building strengths, leadership, being goal-oriented, communication, and diversity (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2021).

Teamwork

Teamwork and camaraderie are critical components of military service. A part of the military culture is solidified in the service member's experience, through cooperation with one another to accomplish the task or mission at hand. In the military, team members rely on each other for efficiency and safety. Teamwork is ingrained in veterans from their military career which is carried over into their civilian roles as professionals. (Keeling et al., 2018). Military veterans understand this value of teamwork and continue to encourage one another in developing a sense of shared responsibility, working together to organize and accomplish employment goals in the workforce.

Organization and Leadership

The military is a highly structured organization with service members who are assigned roles based on duty and responsibility. All branches of the military understand the ways to control behaviors for effective outcomes. Veterans have developed management dynamics as a part of each hierarchical and peer structure. Additionally, they tend to examine one's capabilities in advance as a safeguard to have each servicemember effectively placed within a role that quantitatively matches the abilities of the individual. "A veteran can additionally be placed into control roles quickly, and likely have already obtained considerable education in leadership methods" (McDermott & Jackson, 2020). Military members learn to respect and appreciate the chain of command, which is established to encourage personal and mission accountability. In a qualitative study conducted by McDermott & Jackson, seven franchise military veteran business

owners were interviewed. All participants indicated that they had higher job satisfaction, and attributed their success in their business ventures to their military experience, especially to the quality of leadership. (McDermott & Jackson, 2020). Through experience and training, veterans learned how to motivate, encourage, and support one another through detailed and intentional communication, delegation, and leading by example (Eiler et al., 2021).

Goal-orientated and Focused

Military members and veterans understand the significance of being focused and following through with a mission until it is accomplished. McDermott & Jackson (2020) noted that military veterans do not get distracted by less important matters, and that there is a distinct skill set of prioritization and discipline, both as a unit and as an individual. Goal orientation was described as resiliency, tenacity, and results (McDermott & Jackson, 2020). Resiliency as a component of goal-orientation was defined by participants as the ability to "bounce back," the "ability to handle stress," and has proven to be a highly regarded characteristic of veterans in the workforce (McDermott & Jackson, 2020). Tenacity is described by veterans as the ability to remain persistent and preserve in the face of adversity (Cox, 2020).

Diversity

The United States is awakening to the need for diversity, equal representation, and the inclusion of many peoples. Military veterans not only represent a large diversity of ethnic, racial, gender, and religious groups themselves, but veterans have the experience from their military service which is able to appreciate different types of people and cultures (Fontanta & Rosenheck, 2008). Veterans are sensitive to the diverse needs of many and understand the challenges that present in communication, unification, and accomplishment of a cohesive diverse unit

(Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2021). Fontanta and Rosenheck (2008) compared veteran demographics from different service eras and were able to effectively show that there has been an increase in ethnic, racial, and gender diversity representation (Fontanta & Rosenheck, 2008). In other research, it has been explained that diversity is the key to success within the military, "If an individual is going to achieve success inside the army, an individual wants to paint with all types of humans, from all races, creeds, genders, backgrounds, and persuasions" (McDermott & Jackson, 2020). Currently, the U.S. military is smaller but shows the highest level of diversity in military history (Barraso, 2019). As demographic diversity continues to grow within the military population, awareness of different cultures, histories, and traditions will be experienced by everyone, providing individuals with a new appreciation and acceptance of others' ideas, perspectives, and traditions (Samovar et al. 2016).

The Transition From Active Duty to Veteran Life

The military is highly effective at training and transitioning recruits into the military culture and lifestyle; however, the military as an organizational whole is much less effective in assisting soldiers with their return to the civilian world. In policy and research there is a focus on medical and psychological diagnoses because of military service, which hinders the transition that post-9/11 veterans experience (Finley, 2011). Finley, (2011) explained the VA is the largest health care system in the United States. Health care is provided to veterans by federal employees, whose actions are constantly under scrutiny and in flux due to political debate over policy and procedure, specifically when it comes to eligibility of benefits. The two main components of eligibility are income and service-related injuries (Finley, 2011). Uncertainty in the VA due to policy and procedures has led veterans to lose confidence in the VA and to have concerns

regarding privacy, security, and abuse of services (Cheney et al., 2018). Since 2018, the VA has begun to utilize veterans to assist in the planning of research projects to address supporting other veterans overcome treatment barriers, and to refurbish VA systems which will enhance the VA system's efficacy implementing systems to encourage VA healthcare utilization (Richman, M., 2020; Nearing et al., 2022).

In 2008, much of the enlisted military in all service branches effectively operated with approximately 52% being lower enlisted servicemembers and noncommissioned officers aged 25 years or younger (U.S. DOD, 2008). According to the Government Accountability Office, an anticipated 230,000-245,000 post-9/11veterans were discharged from their military service each year from 2003 to 2019 (U.S. GOA, 2014). The number of veterans reintegrating into civilian life per year is unprecedented for such a short duration of time. Carlos et al. (2017) were able to identify several needs to consider and prepare veterans for transition. From 2014-2016, 65-80% of veterans identified that they were leaving the military without employment or prospect of employment but shared their expectation that they would acquire meaningful employment quickly. Additionally, veterans expect society will not be adequately prepared to address many of their needs, such as physical and mental health care, and education (Carlos et al., 2017). Nickerson and Goldstein (2015) explained that VA resources were unprepared to provide services to veterans in a timely manner. Veterans continue to wait 2-3 times longer for some services when compared to civilian health care providers.

Post-9/11 veterans, being relatively young, are now relocating back to their home towns and States, needing to reestablish routines which include lifestyle changes outside the structure and support of the military, and re-engaging in education. Significant life changes are complex

for any individual and part of individual growth; however, accompanying these challenges with

physical health conditions, psychological diagnoses, and social difficulties, means post-9/11

veterans often struggle to maintain stability (Morgan et al., 2020). Unfortunately, many of these

challenges are often overlooked when compared to the effects of combat and other extreme

circumstances.

Education

Post-9/11 military veterans place the most significant emphasis on employment followed

by education (Aronson et al., 2019). In one sample, 65% of veterans needed assistance gaining

employment, 56% needed healthcare, and 47% identified mental health care as a need (Castro et

al., 2014). The government-issued G.I. Bill provides most veterans the ability to return to school

and gain a higher education, including stipends for books and materials, and living stipends.

However, other considerations regarding education are the presentation of medical conditions

that may decrease the likelihood of one's success. According to the USC Center for Innovation

and Research, veterans frequently have musculoskeletal and other somatic symptoms which

cause large amounts of pain and discomfort, making it increasingly challenging to stay focused

and positively engaged with their peers (USC, 2016). Additionally, the education system should

consider the veterans' experience with mental health diagnoses, such as PTSD, Anxiety, and

Depression, and how these diagnoses impair cognitive and emotional regulation and functioning

which lead to issues with sleep, pain, and maladaptive coping strategies such as substance use

(Hoge et al., 2009; Hoge et al., 2014). Faculty members are unaware of the challenges veterans

face such as affecting the veteran's ability to relate with classmates, in some cases effect

knowledge acquisition and recollection (Palethorpe & Wilson, 2011), leading the veteran student

to not engage with faculty (Falkey, M. 2016); however, an informed faculty member can provide early intervention (Sander, 2012).

Social Relationships

Research following post-9/11 veterans reported a significant increase at approximately 60% having interpersonal problems, specifically intimate partner violence, and one third of relationship partners endorsing being afraid of their veteran partner (Valera et al., 2022). Additional research has indicated that upward of 75% of returning Post 9/11 veterans with a mental health diagnosis from the VA have experienced relational difficulties with their significant others and children (Milliken et al., 2007). Additionally, there are increased positive correlations between intimate relationship dissatisfaction, mental symptoms, somatic disturbances, and substance use (Gerwitz et al., 2010). One helpful measure is that relationships with higher levels of communication exhibit decreased mental health symptoms (Milliken et al., 2007). These communicative service members/veterans have increased desirability to have their partner as an active participant in treatment (Batten et al. 2009).

Post 9/11 Veterans also tend to have difficulty relating with their student peers in educational settings given the vast differences in lived experience and age gap, which is approximately ten years on average (Zogas, 2017). Professionally, veterans often see themselves as underrecognized by co-workers and employers due to their standards of professionalism being different from others' expectations due to the strict standards of excellence carried over from the rigidity and structure of their military service. In work environments, post-9/11 veterans often worry that they are seen as defective or dangerous compared to other employees, given their military service and what is socially perpetuated regarding mental and physical health (Zogas,

2017), especially when considering the violent, depressed, and broken roles veterans are

portrayed as in entertainment (Hoit, K. 2012). All these considerations tend to influence a 9/11

military veteran to isolate and withdraw from others who are not part of their cultural group, take

unnecessary risks and act impulsively, and isolate from loved ones out of internalized stigma and

judgment from others to protect those whom they love (Castro et al., 2015).

Evidence-Based Treatment Approaches

When working with military personnel and their families, trauma-informed

methodologies should always be prioritized (Steele & Malchiodi, 2012). Therapeutic

interventions and modalities for the post-9/11 military have been researched and dictated by

three major entities: the VA, DOD, and APA. These agencies recognize and agree on best

practices such as Prolonged Exposure, Cognitive Processing Therapy, and Cognitive Behavioral

Therapy (Watkins et al., 2018). These methodologies focus on the interplay of cognitive

evaluations, emotional regulation, and behavioral outcomes to address symptoms, apply coping

strategies, and stimulate change. In addition, to these well-established and researched modalities,

there is growing research for new modalities such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy,

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (Culbreth

et al., 2015).

Alternative Approaches

Existential/Transpersonal (ET) treatment with military veterans recognizes the adverse

effects of trauma, pain, and death, ultimately leading to outcomes of aggressive behaviors,

detachment, and patterns of avoidance to protect oneself (Franco & Efthimiou, (2018). ET is an

approach that allows veterans to become in tune with a holistic, more complete version of

themselves physically, spiritually, psychologically, and socially (Corbett & Milton, 2011). ET is person-centered and focused on the veteran's needs as well as instilled and solidified values through military service, empowering the veteran to use their free will to find value and reconnect with the lost self (Osran et al., 2010).

Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy (AAP) is showing promising positive outcomes. AAP with veterans helps with reconnecting to the present. Animals can sense emotional states and assist the veteran with maintaining stability and creating an environment of peace and relaxation (Winstin & Chassman, 2013). Utilizing animals in therapy has increased the therapeutic alliance between client and clinician (Carminait et al.,2013). Zilch-Mano and Colleagues (2011) showed that animals could create and maintain attachment with human beings, strengthen bonds, create emotional safety, stability, security in a relationship, and heal the veteran's ability to relate and communicate with others (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011).

Resiliency

According to the Undersecretary of Defense office, the U.S. Army makes up 36% of the active-duty military, making it the largest branch of service. The Army's largest MOS is the infantry, 11B, comprising upwards of 20% of the Army (Tran, 2015), making it the most likely branch to deploy and participate in combat (V. Rob, 2021). Since the War on Terror, there has been growing insight into the struggles of active-duty military and veterans after completion of their enlistment, and new efforts to address soldiers' needs on an individual level have been implemented to increase servicemembers' resiliency. To address this concern, in 2008 General Casey aimed to increase the value of psychological strength and awareness as part of the soldier readiness program, adding a new dynamic shift in comprehensive soldier fitness (CSF). The CSF

defines its dimensions as physical, emotional, social, family, and spiritual, and by addressing and reinforcing these dimensions, resiliency is supported (Moore & Barnett, 2013). CSF began with the selection and training of noncommissioned officers (NCOs), effectively making them Master Resiliency Trainers (MRT). After an MRT was assigned to a unit, it was their responsibility to train personnel, raise awareness of policy changes, relay questions and concerns, and increase effective communications, self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, character strengths, and connections (Moore & Barnett, 2013). CSF has significantly influenced the evolution of army culture of mental health, specifically regarding resilience.

Resiliency is commonly understood within the military as relying on personal assets and resources in times of adversity and stress to bounce back and maintain the ability to move forward (Moore & Barnet, 2013). Resilience is developed individually. Over time, this quality may come more naturally to some and remain difficult for others. The military focuses on resiliency-promoting activities which allow both individual and unit trust and cohesion to cultivate. When the need to adapt and become resilient arises, it is a conditioned response being part of the individual and unit. Thereby increasing effectiveness and accuracy in training and on mission (Meichenbaum, 2011). There is an expectation in the military that service personnel are capable, stable, and motivated to perform to a high standard, meeting this standard in all dimensions of mind, body, and spirit (Bowles & Bartone, 2017). Maddi and Khoshaba (2005) described the key factors desired in military personnel that allow a soldier to improvise, adapt, and overcome barriers within high-stress environments or confrontation by adversity as being control, commitment, challenge, social support, and transformation thought.

Post-9/11 veterans are the first military cohort that has had specific programs designed and implemented to increase psychological resiliency (Moore & Barnet, 2013). Research has been conducted to observe the relationship between psychological distress, sleep, and resiliency. Results indicated that veterans with higher levels of resiliency are less likely to develop, and more likely to recover from, psychological distress, successfully increasing sleep quality and reinforcing psychological healing and coping (Hughes et al., 2018). In a sample of over 1000 post-9/11 veterans, the use of resiliency screening measures before deployment proved beneficial for the identification of individual strengths and was an effective way to both reduce psychological distress and decrease the likelihood of emotional disorders (Campbell et al., 2018). Resilience is often studied in conjunction with psychological health. However, research shows increased benefits for future research coupling physical health and resilience. Psychological health is often associated with somatic symptoms; understanding somatic symptoms may provide the added benefit of understanding resiliency traits (Sheerin et al., 2019).

The Center for Military Health and Research analyzed literature from 270 research publications to identify evidence of factors that promote psychological resilience and to determine the strength of the evidence. The four main categories were identified as individual, family, unit, and community (Meredith et al., 2011). Results have indicated that there has been an extensive focus on the aspects of individual, family, and unit through military services and training programs; however, there has been a reduced emphasis on the community factors associated with resilience and reintegration such as belongingness, connectedness, and shared values (Meredith et al., 2011). Sripada and colleagues (2016) explained that group therapies are more effective for military veterans diagnosed with PTSD, and veterans are twice as likely to

continue attending therapy, primarily due to community factors and needs being met (Sripada et al., 2016).

Information for Professionals

Post-9/11 veterans present with more injuries than any other military cohort (Olenick et al., 2015). Due to the advancement of medical science, both in combat and in hospitals, many more veterans survive their injuries and continue to live with disabilities (Olenick et al., 2015). During the Civil War, the injury to death ratio was 1 to 1, during both World War I and II, the injury to death ratio was 2 to 1; in Vietnam, this ratio rose to 3 to 1, and in current Post-9/11 conflicts, the ratio has increased to 7.5:1 (Amara & Hendricks, 2016), leaving approximately 41% or 1.7 million of the post-9/11 cohort with a physical disability. According to the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2018, approximately half of post-9/11 veterans have a service-connected VA disability rating of 60% or higher (Sisk, 2019). Disabilities have a lasting effect on veterans who have been conditioned and trained to be determined and focused-oriented. When veterans are disabled, they are at high risk of unemployment, homelessness, and substance use (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2015). Like many other times in history, there is a drive to develop better psychosocial programs to assist veterans to reintegrate healthily and successfully.

There is a current outpouring of communal engagement and social support for veterans. Drebin et al. (2018) discussed how community-based support systems could be an effective tool in the military to veteran transition. With an increased and more effective referral system, veterans could receive social support from military and nonmilitary agencies and resources before discharge from military service (Drebin et al., 2018). An additional area of focus is within

the family unit transitioning and supporting one another. Research by Sherman and Larsen (2018) suggested an increased number of community supports for families that provide psychoeducation focused on the family's strengths, thereby strengthening the family cohesiveness, relationships, and dependability. In conjunction with community support and resources, there is an increased number of standardized family interventions such as Families Overcoming Under Stress (FOCUS), Family Resilience Training, Cognitive-Behavioral Conjoint Therapy for PTSD, and Support and Family Education program (SAFE). Engagement with Veterans, their families, and Veteran service Organization using this method as shown to increase satisfaction for many in the military to civilian transition (Russell & Russell, 2018). These methods draw upon the strengths instilled by the military culture to decrease the veteran's feelings of isolation and disconnection, raising awareness in the individual, family, military unit, and ultimately having a positive effect for change in the military organization.

Today there are more psychological interventions, tools, and modalities than ever before. Over the past few decades, there has been an urgency for understanding mental diagnoses and physical ailments. However, as conflicts diminish and more military service members return to the country and are discharged from their service, awareness has shifted to increased integration of social interventions in conjunction with psychological needs. Bovin and colleagues (2018) developed an Inventory of Psychological Functioning for civilian clinicians to assist in measuring veteran improved functioning, as opposed to solely focusing on symptom reduction and management. Veterans need education and tools to address their diagnoses; however, they also need to be prepared for civilian responsibilities, such as employment, education, and many dynamics of interpersonal relationships, which prove to be critical factors for successful

reintegration (Voorhees et al., 2018; Wewiorski et al., 2018). As veterans improve socially and psychologically, so also does their functionality.

"Unless we understand their language, their structure, why they join, their commitment to the mission, and the role of honor and sacrifice in military service, we will not be able to adequately intervene and offer care to these families" (Hall, 2011).

Chapter 2

Overview

Post-9/11 veterans were a military cohort unique in American history. These veterans were the cohort that held the highest number of enlisted at the youngest ages (Garcia et al., 2014; Jakupcak et al., 2014). Additionally, the two-decade War on Terror had seen those with the most time deployed in a combat zone compared to any other veteran group. Post-9/11 veterans had been deployed longer and more often, sustaining more injuries and receiving more disability ratings than any other cohort (Parker et al., 2019). Compared to any other military veteran cohort, the Post-9/11 cohort stood at the highest need for medical and psychological services but was the least likely to obtain treatment (Garcia et al., 2014; Jakupcak et al., 2014). Most research aimed to be deficit-focused and geared toward understanding diagnoses, symptom management, and coping through empirically validated modalities. The present study intended to investigate the internal strengths and protective factors intrinsic to the post-9/11 cohort. By focusing on the individual experiences of these post-9/11 military veterans, the hope was to identify the characteristics and qualities of individuals, military organizations, and other support systems so that there could be an extensive focus on empowering and encouraging veterans to identify and utilize both internal and systemic resources for their benefit.

Operational Definitions

- Resiliency is the process by which an individual is successfully able to overcome adversity, the ability to improvise and adapt to difficult situations, and recover from the effects of mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally challenging experiences (Straus et al., 2019).

- Protective Factors are characteristics or resources that lower a person's likelihood to be subjected to the negative after-effects of an emotionally, psychologically difficult experience, or reduces the risk of experiencing impact from these challenging incidents (Nichter et al., 2020).

Philosophical Worldview

To obtain the desired information, an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was conducted to allow each post-9/11 veteran participant to speak freely about their military experience and reintegration into the civilian world regarding resiliency. Each participant was allowed to define and explain resiliency and express their thoughts and feelings regarding resiliency before, during, and after enlistment. Additionally, inquiries were made about their opinions regarding what changes in military systems and culture could benefit future veterans and help them remain resilient in their military-to-civilian transition. IPA was well-suited for this type of research. IPA is especially useful in understanding complicated and emotionally filled experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Being part of the military is held in high esteem by veterans. It is a critical component of their identity filled with extremes of emotion and experience, which IPA allowed an evaluation of the fundamental nature of the veteran's assessment of resiliency. The three primary theoretical assumptions of IPA are Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Phenomenology is concerned with the individual perception and evaluation of a lived experience. Hermeneutics involves the active role of the researcher in interpreting and making sense of the participants' evaluations and experiences. Lastly, Idiography is focused on an in-depth, detailed analysis of each participant's experience as a particular example, unique from others. IPA provided an opportunity to

understand the veteran perspective and explore how veterans perceived, evaluated, and interacted within their environments, such as home, work, and recreation. This research aimed to gain further detailed insight into the resiliency, protective factors, and strengths of the qualities and characteristics of post-9/11 army veterans.

Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?

2. What is your gender?

      a. <u>Male</u>

      b. <u>Female</u>

      c. <u>Prefer not to answer.</u>

3. What is your ethnicity? <u>Check all that apply:</u>

      a. <u>Hispanic/Latino origin</u>

      b. <u>White/European American</u>

      c. <u>Black/African American</u>

      d. <u>Asian</u>

      e. <u>American Indian/Alaska Native</u>

      f. <u>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</u>

      g. <u>Aboriginal</u>

      h. <u>Other: _____</u>

4. What is your current relationship status?

5. What is your highest level of education?

6. What branch of service were you enlisted in?

7. What were your Rank and Military Occupational Specialty?

8. How many times were you deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, or both?

9. Do you experience mental health struggles (e.g., PTSD, Depression, Anxiety)?

10. Do you currently or have you ever sought help to address these concerns?

Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of resiliency and how do you think people develop this quality?

2. What people come to mind when you think of resiliency?

3. What experiences did you have before military service that prepared you for enlistment and influenced your resilience, good or bad?

4. What experiences from your military career stand out above the rest where you were especially resilient?

5. Describe your experience of vulnerability during a time when you felt less resilient, how would you describe your experience?

6. During your transition back into the civilian world, what challenges did you face and how did you handle them?

7. What have you noticed among other soldiers and veterans who recovered the least or were hit the hardest?

8. How have you found a sense of community, or not, since leaving the military?

9. What protective factors are there in your life which help you cope and deal with life struggles?

10. How have these protective factors changed or developed over your lifetime?

11. If you had the ability to make any changes to the military culture to foster more resilience in other soldiers or veterans, what would you change and why?

Population and Sample

Eligible participants of this research were members of the post-9/11 military veteran

cohort who had been deployed and had served in a direct combat or combat support MOS. Alase

(2017) indicated that IPA qualitative research can range from 5-25 participants. The sample size

consisted of 8 Army veteran participants who had served in any or multiple post-9/11 combat

theaters of operations (Operations Iraqi Freedom [OIF] and New Dawn [OND] and Afghanistan

[Operation Enduring Freedom, OEF]).

Data Collection, Process, and Procedures

Participants were recruited through word of mouth and snowball sampling. The

researcher utilized snowballing by asking for referrals from peers, coworkers, and acquaintances.

Participants were not known personally by the researcher. Using this method allowed the

researcher to identify veterans who met inclusionary criteria and created enough rapport with

participants to have a deeper level of disclosure in response to research questions. The research

did not include friends, family, or anyone deemed too close or who would constitute a dual

relationship. The researcher contacted participants directly by email with a Qualtrics link to a

brief demographic survey, and informed consent was given. The invitation to participate

included the researcher's contact information, plan, purpose of the current research, eligibility

requirements, informed consent regarding the interview and questions, the benefits of the

research, and an explanation of the incentive for participation.

The veterans who chose to participate were interviewed individually by the researcher via

Microsoft Teams so that audio transcription could be generated for coding. Interview transcripts

were stored on a password-protected USB drive, which was stored in a large, level three home

security safe in the researcher's locked office. Only the researcher had access to the safe and the

password for the USB drive. The interview, which took place, was conducted in a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews were commonly used in qualitative research, bringing a structure to the discussion's purpose but allowing for flexibility. As new information and ideals were divulged, they also could be pursued for a complete understanding and richness presented in the interview (Kakilla, 2021). Participants were allowed to ask any questions or voice concerns before the interview, and resources were provided as part of the informed consent process to address any lingering distress that may follow the interview. Participants were informed that they could discontinue at any time and for any reason. The interview was planned to take approximately one hour. After completing the interview, participants were sent a copy of their interview transcript via email to clarify or edit any information as they saw fit. Communication via email did not remain in the researcher's inbox. However, it was archived as a Word document saved on the password-protected USB hard drive and deleted from the researcher's inbox. All documents related to the research were deleted at the conclusion of the study.

Lastly, the military veteran community is a relatively small group, so there was a slight likelihood that the researcher may have encountered a participant outside the research setting. If the scenario were to transpire, the researcher would only approach or engage the veteran participant if they initiated communication first. The veteran participant would be given complete autonomy on whether to address the researcher and, if they did, provide an explanation of their choosing on how they were personally acquainted.

Data Analysis, Process, and Procedures

Remaining consistent with the IPA framework, each interview was coded independently. The initial coding focused on understanding each statement's meaning and was later condensed into its simplest form, later categorized into themes. When each interview had been conducted and coded, they were compared to one another to identify any general or common themes amongst participants and perhaps differences based on the different cultures and mindsets present between the different military branches.

The researcher was the sole coder and utilized NVivo to organize and structure codes and themes from the research. There were no peer or co-researchers. As a result of the exhaustive coding process, the researcher used NVivo. NVivo is research software designed for qualitative research and the organization of codes and themes (Alam, 2020). NVivo was particularly helpful due to its ability to determine the coding significances and relationships found within interview transcripts and created a system of easy organization and retrieval of data.

Validity and Reliability

Once the transcript was coded, the researcher sent a copy of the coded transcript to the appropriate participant, allowing them to review the transcript for the accuracy of their lived experiences. Once the participant had reviewed the transcript of their interview, they could correct or clarify statements to either accept or reject their coding and encouraged the research to increase the accuracy of reporting.

Compensation of Participants

Veteran volunteers who participated in this study received a $20 Amazon gift card as an expression of gratitude for their participation in the research and for trusting me with their valuable thoughts and feelings based on their real-life experiences. E-Gift cards were sent to the email addresses provided and utilized for communication throughout the participation in the study, ensuring that no personal data was exchanged.

Personal Bias

This study used an interpretive phenomenological research design to interview combat military vets about their lived experiences. To remain objective, I considered my beliefs and feelings related to resiliency and protective factors due to my close connection with family and friends who belonged to this cohort of military veterans. I took the time to check my biases before coding interviews for themes and patterns to uncover the meaning of each participant's lived experience objectively. I also used NVivo coding software to minimize biases.

The research intended to increase the understanding of resiliency and protective factors through the eyes of the veterans themselves. The research findings could have significantly increased the understanding of this population and how to improve effective services and interventions. Additionally, these outcomes could have assisted veterans themselves in having an improved sense of trust and rapport within the counseling environment, creating an internal desire to participate in treatment interventions.

Protection of Participants

Participants had their identities replaced with pseudonyms in all transcripts, and writing associated with the research was de-identified. All research content was stored on a password-protected USB drive, which was kept in a large, level three home security safe in a locked office.

There was no utilization of third-party information servers, such as the cloud. The utilization of NVivo software benefited the researcher in coding and organizing data but did not jeopardize the confidentiality of participants. Only the researcher had access to the safe and the password for the USB drive. Data was stored for the project's duration and destroyed when the dissertation research was complete.

All methods used were submitted to the Northwest University Institutional Review Board for approval to ensure that all stages of the research were conducted with the safety and security of the participants in mind. The research was pursued and conducted after approval and deemed ethical. If participants wished to withdraw from the research project at any time, they were welcome and received no negative recourse.

Chapter 3

Results

This study examines the lived experiences of combat Army veterans using the

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to qualitative research. IPA is a

comprehensive approach that combines three fundamental elements: phenomenology,

hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In the context of the present study,

this method aims to delve into the intricacies of experiences (idiography), providing an account

of the lived experiences of each army veteran (phenomenology) and exploring how participants

endeavor to make sense of their encounters (hermeneutics) (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Each post-

9/11 veteran had the opportunity to speak freely on their personal military experience and

reintegration into the civilian world, regarding resiliency, expressing their thoughts and feelings

regarding resiliency before, during, and after enlistment. Additionally, I inquired about their

opinions regarding what changes in military systems and culture could benefit future veterans

and help them remain resilient in their military-to-civilian transition. This research aims to

provide additional insight and understanding, bridging the gap between the Army and civilian

cultures.

This chapter presents the findings that developed through the process of data collection.

There was a total of eight army veterans who participated. The semi-structured interview

protocol was used to guide each veteran's interview with a level of flexibility provided, allowing

the veteran and interviewer to expand on the general themes relevant to the principal research

question. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the interview to be directed by the

experience of everyone to preserve the actual perspective of the individual. Each interview was

conducted and transcribed via Microsoft Teams.

Description of Participants

Veteran participants of this research are members of the post-9/11 military veteran cohort who have been deployed to a combat zone and have served in a direct combat or combat support MOS. Army veteran participants with combat experience also endorsed having mental health struggles as part of their lived experience. Veterans were no younger than 28 based on enlistment in 2010, which would still provide the veteran with approximately five years of deployment opportunities and experiences during the most combat-active years. These age parameters are set to provide specific insight and understanding of Army veterans that have had no combat experience/trauma outside of the War on Terror.

Table 1.0 Description of Participant Attributes

Participant & Rank	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Education	Deployments	Help-seeking
Alpha Charlie E-4	38	F	White	Associate	2	Yes
Kilo Charlie E-4	36	M	White	High School	3	No
Tango Echo E-6	36	M	White	Associate	2	Yes
Romeo Juliet E-4	38	M	White	Graduate	2	No
Charlie Alpha E-7	38	M	White	Bachelors	2	Yes

Delta Yanke E-3	38	M	White	Associate	2	Yes
Juliet Hotel E-4	32	M	White	Professional	1	Yes
Bravo Golf E-5	34	M	White	Bachelors	2	Yes

A meticulous process was employed to assign pseudonyms to each participant to ensure participant anonymity and clarity in communication within the context of this research study. This method, integrated into the broader research methodology, involved a combination of participants' initials and the utilization of the military phonetic alphabet. The initials of each participant's first and last name were extracted. For instance, if a participant's name were John Doe, the corresponding initials would be "JD." Subsequently, the military phonetic alphabet, a standardized set of words representing each letter, was incorporated to create unique and easily distinguishable pseudonyms. For example, the initials "JD" would be translated to "Juliet Delta" using the military phonetic alphabet.

Alpha Charle identified as female, while the remaining veterans identified as male. All veterans' ages ranged from 32 -38 years of age with the average age of participants is 36.25 years old. All participants identified as white, and the education level of achievement varied between participants. Kilo Romeo is a high school graduate, Alpha Charlie, Tango Echo, and Delta Yankee have earned associate degrees. Charlie Alpha and Bravo Golf have earned bachelor's degrees, while Romeo Juliet earned a graduate-level degree and Juliet Hotel graduated with a doctoral-level degree.

Per inclusion criteria, each participant had been enlisted in the military, served in a combat or combat support MOS, and was deployed. Participant 2 endorsed engaging in 3 combat deployments, while Participant 7 was deployed once. The remaining 6 participants were all deployed twice. Each veteran participant endorsed having experienced mental health symptoms or struggles with interpersonal relationships that they attribute to the effect of their service in the Army. Participants 2 and 4 endorse never seeking help or resources to address their mental health or interpersonal struggles, while the remaining 6 participants have engaged in help-seeking to address their needs.

Data Analysis Procedures

Each participant was interviewed individually via a digital platform (i.e., Microsoft Teams) where the transcription feature was utilized. In addition to using interview transcription services, notes focusing on each participant's behavioral observations were meticulously recorded throughout the interview. The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to explore prominent aspects of each veteran's lived experience as conveyed and related to resiliency and protective factors. The eleven interview questions provided uniformity to the interview process and framework for content; however, the direction of the interview was determined by the participants' individual responses. The interviewer pursued related trains of thought, asking for explanation or clarity to ensure understanding and context of each participant's disclosures.

The Microsoft Teams transcription feature provided verbatim recording of each interview. Each line of the transcript was assigned a number or timestamp to serve as a reference point during the initial (i.e., descriptive) level of coding. Subsequently, every interview was thoroughly reviewed, compared to field notes, and supplemented with additional behavioral observations.

Once each interview had been fully transcribed based on the audio recording, the researcher employed a constructivist approach to analyze the data. This method involved meticulously examining and coding the transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings to identify emerging patterns or categories that highlighted shared aspects of the participants' lived experiences, which could then be organized into overarching research themes.

NVivo is a specialized software application designed for qualitative data analysis. Its primary purpose is to assist researchers in organizing, managing, and analyzing qualitative data, including text, audio, video, and images. It is widely used in various fields, such as social sciences, psychology, anthropology, and health research, to facilitate the coding and interpreting of complex textual or multimedia data, including interviews (Allsop et. al., 2022). It helps researchers efficiently organize and store interview data, such as transcripts, field notes, and recordings, in one secure location, simplifying data management. NVivo facilitates systematic coding, labeling, and categorizing interview data, making it easier to track and analyze themes and interpretations. Researchers can retrieve specific data segments using assigned codes or attributes, enabling in-depth analysis of themes and patterns within interviews. NVivo supports comparing coded data across interviews, aiding in identifying commonalities, differences, and emerging patterns. The software offers visualization tools like charts and graphs to help researchers represent data visually, enhancing exploration and presentation. NVivo is a powerful tool for conducting IPA or other qualitative research methodologies. It streamlines the coding process, supports identifying themes and patterns, and enhances qualitative research's overall rigor and depth by helping researchers extract valuable insights from interviews and other qualitative data sources.

Data Coding. The researcher transcribed every transcript independently, where it was

coded for emergent predominant themes and topics. After completing transcript coding, each transcript begins a second coding process. See Table 2.0 for an example of a coding diagram.

Validity and Reliability

Member Checking. Member Checking is a critical process in IPA that enhances the validity and reliability of the findings. It involves engaging participants in the research by allowing them to review and validate the interpretations of their experiences as captured in the research. This method fosters a collaborative approach, ensuring that the participants' perspectives are accurately represented, and that the analysis is trustworthy. By seeking participant feedback, a researcher can confirm the accuracy of their interpretations and insights derived from the data. This iterative process of member checking enhances the credibility and dependability of the research, ultimately contributing to the robustness of the findings and the overall quality of the IPA study.

Table 2

Coding Process
1. Transcribe Veteran Interviews
2. Member Checking
3. Initial Coding
4. Revision of Initial Codes
5. Focused Coding
6. Revision of Focused Codes
7. Grouping Codes into Thematic Categories

Participant Experience and History

Alpha Charlie: Alpha Charlie shared her experiences and insights on resiliency during a candid interview. She described her journey as a combination of overcoming childhood trauma and building resiliency through her military service. Alpha Charlie spoke about the definition of resiliency, stating that "it is the ability to keep getting up, not to give up." She emphasized the importance of "trying in the first place because resiliency cannot exist without taking the first step." She noted that many people "confuse resilience with merely being tough," but true resilience comes from experiencing and overcoming challenges. She highlighted the significance of starting and going through challenging experiences in building resiliency. Alpha Charlie shared how her military service taught her resiliency, as she had to endure physical and mental challenges as a young recruit. She mentioned the "demanding and demoralizing tasks" she had to perform but acknowledged that these experiences contributed to her growth and resilience. Alpha Charlie emphasized that resiliency is "not built by reading books or observing others" but by going through difficult circumstances and "continuing to grow." She mentioned that veterans often possess a high level of resiliency due to their extensive training and hardships in the military. Alpha Charlie expressed her admiration for children with special needs, noting their incredible resilience and determination, which gives her hope for the future. When discussing vulnerability, Alpha Charlie opened up about her experiences in toxic relationships and how she lost herself in those situations. She acknowledged that "lack of knowledge and awareness contributed to her vulnerability" during those times. She emphasized the importance of "understanding oneself and having solid knowledge" to avoid falling into unhealthy and destructive situations.

Regarding challenges during her transition back to civilian life, Alpha Charlie mentioned

the "lack of teamwork and responsibility" she observed among her peers. She expressed

frustration with people being unable to work together, pointing out the stark difference from the

"military culture that emphasizes teamwork and looking out for one another." She noted that the

absence of a strong support system like military camaraderie can make the transition more

challenging. When reflecting on veterans' struggles, Alpha Charlie identified addiction, mental

health issues, and lack of support as common denominators. She stated that these individuals

often battle internal demons that impact their ability to recover and lead successful lives. Alpha

Charlie emphasized the need for a strong support system beyond what family can provide as the

military becomes a significant part of veterans' lives. Regarding finding a sense of community,

Alpha Charlie admitted that she struggles to fit in and often feels like she does not belong

anywhere. She mentioned that her "true community lies with her children," with whom she

spends most of her time. Alpha Charlie acknowledged that her understanding and connection

with children stem from her own experiences and her ability to relate to their resilience and

innocence. Alpha Charlie's determination to overcome challenges and embrace resilience was

evident throughout the interview. She shared her insights with honesty and humor,

acknowledging her own unique perspective and life experiences. Alpha Charlie's story serves as

a reminder of the importance of support, understanding, and empathy for individuals navigating

the path toward resilience and personal growth.

Kilo Charlie: Kilo Charlie shared his experiences and perspectives on resiliency during

the interview. Kilo Charlie discussed his decision to join the Army in 2005 due to a lack of

resilience in dealing with the crashing economy. Kilo Charlie explained, "I was a small business

owner doing well, but I saw the economy crashing all around me...I thought getting a

government job would be the answer." This decision to join the army was driven by a desire to

"escape my financial struggles and provide a stable environment for my family." Throughout the conversation, he expressed a sense of jadedness and skepticism towards the idea of resiliency. Kilo Charlie believed that true resiliency is lacking on an individual level and highlighted veterans' challenges in transitioning back to civilian life. Kilo Charlie stated, "You never know what anyone is going through...we all have guilt and shame... it is easy to think that everyone out there is crushing it, but they are not." Kilo Charlie emphasized the importance of recognizing that social media often presents a distorted and idealized version of people's lives, contributing to feelings of inadequacy and shame. When asked about past experiences that influenced their resilience, Kilo Charlie revealed He "lacked patience and confidence in his abilities," particularly when facing financial difficulties. He acknowledged that they made mistakes and struggled to cope effectively. Kilo Charlie noted, "I was not resilient...I would have restructured and moved forward, but I did not have the patience or belief in myself." Kilo Charlie acknowledged personal growth and learning from past experiences despite his jadedness. He recognized the significance of "developing a sense of self and overcoming challenges." Kilo Charlie expressed a belief that societal expectations and pressures can hinder one's ability to become resilient. They criticized the glorification of specific military figures and the false narratives that can be perpetuated through books and movies. Kilo Charlie stated, "I think the Marcus Luttrells of the world...are a ******* problem." Kilo Charlie's narrative highlighted the complexities and difficulties of resilience. He provided insights into their journey, acknowledging past mistakes and emphasizing the need to challenge societal expectations. Through their experiences, Kilo Charlie has gained a deeper understanding of resilience and the importance of individual growth and self-acceptance.

　　Tango Echo: Tango Echo shared his experiences and challenges throughout his life,

highlighting his resilience and determination. He started by discussing his definition of resiliency, stating that it means "overcoming obstacles and pushing through objectives." He emphasized the importance of "never quitting" and shared a personal story of carrying an oath of perseverance. Tango Echo reflected on the factors that contribute to the development of resiliency, including life experiences and the "circumstances and environment in which people grow up." He believed some individuals naturally possess "higher levels of resilience due to their upbringing," while others develop it through overcoming obstacles and learning from them. He mentioned his wife as a current role model in terms of resilience, highlighting her success in pursuing education and career goals despite becoming a mother at a young age. Tango Echo also mentioned his grandparents, describing them as "tough individuals" who faced challenges such as carrying water for their family from another location until they could afford a well. The conversation shifted to the differences between older and younger generations regarding resilience. Tango Echo believed that previous generations had "fewer options and fallbacks, which forced them to adapt and persevere." However, he acknowledged that some individuals in younger generations also develop resilience through life experiences and overcoming hardships. Tango Echo mentioned some influences and role models in his life, with his wife being a significant example. Despite becoming a mother at a young age, he admired her ability to overcome challenges and achieve academic and professional success. He also mentioned his grandparents and their inspiring stories of perseverance and determination in adversity.

Tango Echo further discussed the impact of resilience in different areas of life, including sports and the military. He mentioned that while there are similarities, the bond formed during military service and the reliance on one another for survival creates a "unique level of camaraderie and loyalty." Tango Echo's military career and the challenges he faced during

deployment were described as a particularly "tough and casualty-heavy deployment" during the surge in Iraq. Tango Echo highlighted the importance of loyalty and camaraderie among the soldiers in his platoon as the driving force that kept them going through difficult times. He recounted a mission where they faced multiple attacks resulting in numerous casualties, emphasizing the need for "unity and support" amidst the dangers they encountered. Transitioning back to civilian life was challenging for Tango Echo. He spoke about the difficulties of finding employment during the recession, being forced to take temporary jobs, such as remodeling work at Walmart. Despite the setbacks, he expressed gratitude for eventually securing a stable job and being able to support his family. Tango Echo acknowledged that there were times when he struggled with expressing himself and felt overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness. He also mentioned witnessing fellow soldiers struggle with PTSD and the profound impact it had on their lives. He questioned why some individuals were more affected than others and ruminated on the guilt and regret he felt regarding their situations. Tango Echo showed strong empathy and understanding toward those facing mental health struggles. He recognized the need for further research and support for individuals dealing with PTSD and emphasized the importance of seeking understanding and providing assistance. Tango Echo showcased his resilience in overcoming challenges, admiration for those who have demonstrated resilience, and acknowledgment of the complexities surrounding mental health struggles. His experiences underscored the importance of empathy, support, and unity in fostering resilience in both personal and collective contexts.

Romeo Juliet: Romeo Juliet shared his experiences and insights on resiliency and its importance. Romeo Juliet's journey began after leaving the military and entering the civilian world, where he faced challenges and uncertainty. He described feeling "lost and struggling to

find his place," leading to a vulnerable period. "I was in for over eight years…left the military

and had no idea what to do… did not know specifically what I wanted to do…just a job." His

"lack of direction and knowledge of the civilian workforce" added to his feeling of vulnerability.

Romeo Juliet experienced financial difficulties and uncertainty about his future during this time.

However, he "refused to give up" and sought opportunities to grow and learn. He explained,

"Every time I hit those milestones, new doors would open…chasing knowledge…every time a

new door opens, a little bit more money, more benefits…just kept trudging along." Romeo

Juliet's resiliency stemmed from his willingness to adapt and persevere, even in the face of

adversity. He recognized the importance of being a lifelong learner and always seeking new

knowledge. Referring to his father's advice, Romeo Juliet shared, "Always be a student…never

stop learning…constantly trying to find new knowledge…finding new doors and open

pathways…allowed me to build and grow."

Romeo Juliet acknowledged that his experiences in the military shaped his perspective on

resiliency. "I've been in a lot of firefights…seen a lot of bad things…been very close to losing

my life…compared to that, everything else in the world seems so unimportant." He stated that

this perspective allowed him to "overcome struggles and put daily challenges into perspective."

Despite feeling vulnerable and uncertain, Romeo Juliet found strength through his determination

and support system. Joining a motorcycle club gave him a "new community and camaraderie."

He stated that to succeed, it is essential to "Find another group of comrades…push

forward…doors will open…stick to it…continuing to push through whatever the issues are."

Romeo Juliet's narrative exemplifies the importance of resilience in navigating through life's

challenges. His experiences highlight the need to embrace learning, adaptability, and

perseverance. He overcame vulnerability and built a successful civilian life by staying focused

on personal growth and keeping perspective.

Charlie Alpha: Charlie Alpha dove into defining resiliency, stating that it is "the ability to adapt and move forward in the face of challenges and uncertainties." Charlie Alpha emphasized the "importance of practice and learning from failures." He shared his journey of developing resilience, acknowledging that " I am not always good at it, but it is a learned skill that requires practicing and starting small." Charlie Alpha further delved into his experiences before his military service, preparing him for the challenges he would face during his enlistment. He spoke about his "independence as a child and the need to figure things out independently." He also mentioned a turning point when he decided to move out and navigate life on his terms.

Transitioning into his military career, Charlie Alpha highlighted that "failure is a significant source of resilience." He discussed how pushing himself to the edge of failure in various situations, such as going through the warrant officer program, helped him develop resilience. He also shared how "failure can be self-imposed and emphasized the importance of tempering expectations and finding the proper response to challenges." Reflecting on his deployment experience, Charlie Alpha acknowledged the difference in perspective between being in a war zone and returning to the civilian world. He shared his "struggle adjusting to the mundane and trivial matters" that seemed significant to others but "felt insignificant compared to his challenges during deployment." Charlie Alpha found solace in focusing on his son as a motivating factor to work through his struggles. Charlie Alpha opened up about a vulnerable period when he faced internal and external challenges. He described a "rough period of stagnation and internal troubles in his marriage," which led him to question himself and consider leaving the military. However, he found strength in his son. He turned to motivational videos and self-reflection to navigate these difficult times, which eventually led him to pursue the MRT

(Master Resilience Training) course, which further shaped his understanding of resilience.

When discussing the challenges of transitioning from a full-time army to civilian life, Charlie Alpha mentioned the "surreal feeling of returning to a different world." He mentioned the frustration of engaging with trivial matters that did not align with his perspective and the struggle to relate to younger college students who had not experienced the same level of life-altering events. Charlie Alpha also shared his hesitation in seeking help from the VA, attributing it to the stigma surrounding mental health and a belief that he did not need it because he had not been "directly involved in combat." Charlie Alpha emphasized the importance of finding a sense of community. He acknowledged the significance of having "support systems and people who could relate to my experiences." Charlie Alpha also recognized the value of empathy and understanding when engaging with others. He described how "my resilience journey led me to step outside myself and observe situations from different perspectives," enhancing his ability to navigate challenges and relate to others. Charlie Alpha's narrative highlighted his personal experiences, struggles, and growth, illustrating the key lessons and insights he gained on his resilience journey.

Delta Yankee: Delta Yankee engaged in a deep and meaningful conversation about experiences, resilience, and the challenges veterans face when transitioning to civilian life. Delta Yankee shared his journey and provided insights into the struggles faced by soldiers and how they cope with them. Delta Yankee opened up about his definition of resiliency, expressing that it is about "keeping going when you do not want to anymore." He shared personal stories of loss, grief, and the challenges he faced while serving in Iraq. Delta Yankee highlighted the importance of "choice and its power" in developing and maintaining resilience. When discussing the development of resilience, Delta Yankee spoke about the role of lived experiences and

upbringing. He shared how his experiences as a child, including an abusive stepmother, shaped his resilience. Delta Yankee emphasized the importance of "making the choice to keep going even in the face of adversity." Delta Yankee also explored the concept of camaraderie and its significant role in a soldier's life. Delta Yankee described the "bond between his fellow soldiers as a unifying factor, providing support and a sense of sanity." He discussed the impact of shared experiences and the "ability to relate to one another," especially during challenging times. Delta Yankee transitioned back to civilian life. Delta Yankee spoke about the "challenges of facing an uncertain future" and the potential "difficulties of finding fulfillment outside of the military." However, he expressed gratitude for the support he received from his colleagues at work, who were also veterans. This camaraderie helped him transition into civilian life and maintain a sense of belonging. Delta Yankee acknowledged the struggles faced by soldiers and veterans, particularly regarding mental health. He recognized that there are different types of coping mechanisms among veterans, including therapy, medication, and reliance on substances. Delta Yankee underlined the importance of seeking professional help and cautioned against unhealthy coping strategies. Delta Yankee's resilience and ability to persevere were evident. His firsthand experiences shed light on the challenges faced by soldiers and veterans and the power of camaraderie in overcoming adversity. Delta Yankee's story serves as a testament to the strength and resilience of those who have served in the military.

      Juliet Hotel: Juliet Hotel defined resiliency as "the ability to find positive outcomes in the face of traumatic or difficult events." He believed that resiliency "develops naturally through various life experiences." Juliet Hotel emphasized the importance of finding "positive change or attainment in order to cultivate resilience." Juliet Hotel highlighted individuals' unique experiences and reactions to the same events. He mentioned examples of people they consider

resilient, such as his old platoon sergeant, who continues to live his life with bilateral amputations. He also mentioned their friend, who displays a "strong and positive attitude" despite facing military and life difficulties. Juliet Hotel also admires his wife's resiliency, who has faced trauma and adversity growing up. Juliet Hotel emphasized the "different forms of resiliency" in the military and civilian sectors. He highlighted the challenges of expressing emotions outside the military, as "stoicism and emotional restraint are ingrained in their identity.'" Juliet Hotel expressed difficulty navigating emotional expression and finding appropriate ways to communicate their feelings after leaving the military.

In discussing the development of resiliency, Juliet Hotel compared individuals on the autism spectrum who may have challenges expressing emotions. He shared that " helpers tend to possess higher resilience but bear the brunt of emotional damage." Juliet Hotel highlighted the training in the military to maintain composure in high-stress situations and the expectation to remain calm and collected even in the face of traumatic events. When reflecting on his military career, Juliet Hotel mentioned two significant experiences. The first was the "constant demand for resilience" during deployment, where sleep was minimal, and he and his fellow soldiers needed to stay sharp and focused despite fatigue. He described adapting to operating on very little sleep and pushing through physical and mental exhaustion. The second experience was related to their platoon sergeant's injury and his own feelings of guilt and responsibility. They mentioned "feeling resilient in the face of adversity but also questioning their actions" and the "what ifs" associated with their role as a combat medic. Juliet Hotel acknowledged the vulnerability they experienced during their relationship with their wife when she faced health issues. He mentioned breaking down emotionally and expressing gratitude for having a diagnosis and a path forward. Juliet Hotel shared many personal anecdotes and reflections; his narrative

conveyed the challenges and complexities of resilience in military and civilian life and highlighted the internal struggles and growth that can accompany these experiences.

Bravo Golf: Bravo Golf shared his experiences and reflections on resilience. He defined resilience as "the ability to persevere through adverse situations and emerge stronger from them." He mentioned that resilience is "developed through exposure to adversity, tenacity, and an unwillingness to quit." He also acknowledged the importance of "social support and previous experiences" in building resilience. Bravo Golf discussed his challenges before and during his military service. He mentioned growing up in an emotionally abusive household and taking on the responsibility of raising his younger brother when his mother "checked out." He also opened up about the trauma he and his brother experienced as they were both molested. Despite these difficult circumstances, Bravo Golf credited his father, who was in the military for 17-18 years, for instilling a "never-give-up mentality" and various qualities that shaped his resilience. Reflecting on his military service, precisely his time as a medic in Afghanistan, Bravo Golf shared the intense and demanding nature of his work at the field hospital. He vividly described the numerous trauma cases they encountered, often resulting in mass casualty events. He recalled the emotional toll these experiences had on him, especially when they involved burned children or the loss of fellow soldiers. Bravo Golf revealed that he initially "felt like a failure when he could not save every life," but later realized that he "cannot control everything" and had to do his best in each situation.

Bravo Golf acknowledged the difficulty of transitioning into the civilian world, admitting that he struggled with the integration process and found it "challenging to adapt to a different culture." He expressed feeling "isolated and not belonging," as the "camaraderie and support system had in the military was missing." Despite these challenges, he acknowledged the support

of his wife, who stood by him throughout, and the fulfillment he found in his work as he applied

his military skills to his civilian job. Bravo Golf shared his observations of soldiers and veterans

who have struggled the most to recover. He spoke about his friend, who had been through

traumatic experiences and had difficulty reaching out for help. Bravo Golf expressed concern as

he witnessed his marriage falling apart and his mental health deteriorating due to not seeking

support. He emphasized the importance of "seeking help and breaking down the barriers" that

prevent individuals from reaching out. Bravo Golf provided insights into the challenges of

resilience, the impact of military service, and the need for support during the transition to civilian

life. His narrative highlighted the struggles faced by veterans and the importance of fostering a

supportive and understanding environment.

Findings and Thematic Categories

This study's account of the lived experience of being an Army veteran is a central

element of phenomenology. The veterans in this study were willing to discuss their experiences

of military service. The participants expressed various positive aspects related to their service.

They exhibited various emotional experiences, ranging from a sense of hope to moments of fear

related to their time in the military. Participants employed diverse strategies during their military

service and noted changes in their approaches. Most participants emphasized that they had a

clear purpose during their service and had some degree of exposure to various military

operations, often adapting their approaches based on their experience. Participants detailed their

social experiences as veterans, describing the friendships they formed and maintained, their

activities, and their neutral experiences during their service. Nearly all participants felt isolated,

disconnected from civilians, and questioned where they fit within their peer groups as Army

veterans. Participants disclosed certain qualities they sought in their comrades and their future

aspirations. A connection between a desire for stability and family life was identified. Many participants mentioned facing external expectations, pressure, and differing viewpoints from others regarding their military service. The participants' unique individual experiences, the intersections of their identities, and the various ways they made sense of their experiences are reflected in the following sections.

Theme 1: Resiliency and Determination

At the heart of veterans' resiliency is their unyielding ability to overcome obstacles and persist in achieving objectives. Delta Yankee clarifies, "When you feel like you can't, you want to give up, and then you just keep going anyway." Adding to this definition, Juliet Hotel states, "and be able to find some outcome for yourself or for those around you that can lead to some type of positive change or positive attainment." Embracing the "Never Quit" ethos, deeply associated with the military creed, instills in them an unwavering determination. Alpha Charlie stated "if I was trying to explain it to a kid, it would be just, getting back up every single time, no matter how bad it hurts, no matter how much it sucks, no matter what you've lost in life, limb, etcetera, just get back up". Simply stated by Bravo Golf as, "an unwillingness to quit." Resilience for these veterans is not merely a theoretical concept but developed through real-life experiences and challenges Juliet Hotel explains, "it's just something that naturally develops and as long as you are out in the world and not a recluse or agoraphobia or something, you will get it." Delta Yankee references childhood experiences explaining, "I think it's about how you are brought up and how you are taught to handle life experiences." Romeo Juliet expounds this concept by stating, "the situations we live and push through kind of help us develop how resilient we are…resiliency builds resiliency." One crucial aspect of this determination is the motivation to improve oneself. A relentless pursuit of personal and professional growth drives veterans.

Recognizing their background and origins as foundational aspects of their character deeply roots resilience. Individuals cultivate a robust sense of resilience in understanding the profound connection to their roots. Tango Echo explains, "I think people are born in the circumstance and the environments they grow up in develop different levels of resiliency… that is the foundation of a person's resilience." A supportive spouse, often a wife, plays a crucial role in their journey to build and maintain resilience. Multiple veterans endorse, "The first one to come to mind was my wife." Juliet Hotel describes an intimate moment with his wife "I have always been stoic around my wife…but the cork came out of whatever was in this bottle was like, there was a lot of emotion that came with it that was really kind of deep in there, self-harm and depression and anxiety… crying for an hour while my wife cradled me." Tango Echo expressed "my wife recognized my struggle with PTSD symptoms". She supported him through his military transitions and encouraged his participation in faith stating, "faith was really impactful on my life and relationship with my wife." For post-9/11 Army veterans, resilience is a choice to persevere, find purpose, and tough it out in difficult situations. Cultural values, family examples, and generational military service further influence it. Veterans who have seen family members serve are often motivated by a strong sense of duty. Romeo Juliet explained 'To be honest, my father and my grandfather are combat veterans and just watching them go through, not only in the military but then coming out of the military and building themselves into highly successful men in the civilian world inspires me to do the same." Juliet Hotel discussed having "My uncle was a Lieutenant Colonel. My aunt was a captain. My dad was a Lieutenant in the Navy. Everyone in my family essentially had served at some point or another, so I got pushed into it." The determination to make things work, even in the face of limited options, is a testament to their strong work ethic. Tango Echo explains family examples teach "resiliency and

determination that in their time there were no fallbacks, they didn't exist, you know, so I'm just going to suck it up." Shared experiences, shared goals, and support from their comrades are vital components of their resilience. Teamwork, loyalty, camaraderie, and unity with fellow service members shape their sense of identity and purpose, and relationships characterized by brotherhood and togetherness reinforce their resilience. Kilo Charlie explained, "During deployment, you are very reliant on your crew members." Alpha Charlie further explains the difference between the military and the civilian world: "Everyone wants to point the finger at everybody else, and nobody knows how to work as a team." The significance of respect, unity, and connectedness underpins resilience in these veterans. Delta Yankee discussed these qualities as "an underlying factor for us; it helps keep us together and helps keep us a little bit saner and makes us feel less crazy." These qualities are the glue that binds the military community and, in turn, contributes to the veterans' ability to overcome adversity. Alpha Charlie discussed, "When you get into the military, especially if you spend significant time in the military, the military becomes your family." Bravo Golf has a reciprocal relationship with the veteran community, "being able to help them also helps me feel like I have community." Juliet Hotel expressed for some time, "I think the challenges I faced were just being isolated and feeling like I didn't have any type of community." Kilo Charlie expressed, "I think that veteran organizations that take groups of guys hunting are very positive." Romeo Juliet states group importance and success as "continuing to push camaraderie and finding organization and finding things to do; military people like to be part of a group."

The journey of becoming emotionally and mentally stronger over time is a defining aspect of post-9/11 Army veterans' resiliency. Military service often exposes them to challenging situations; Bravo Golf explained, "I spent about 20 months total in Afghanistan on

my first deployment." Delta Yankee recounted his experience: "I was in Mosul in 2004 when there was a chow hall bombing there…I lost my NCO and NBC sergeant." Kilo Charlie explained losing his sergeant, "an IED blew him up," and even during training, you experience "such a level of fatigue, it gets really weird, and you start hallucinating…you get tired enough your mind plays tricks on you when you experience great fatigue and sadness." Alpha Charlie concurs, "I think that is where veterans having so much more resiliency is because not only are they trained on the floor, but they also beat you down mentally, physically, all the things." Veterans are forced to, as Charlie Alpha says, "move forward and adapt to just whatever life throws at you." Romeo Juliet stated, "I think about what the military taught me was to improvise, adapt and overcome." These experiences instill a sense of inner strength and resilience, enabling them to confront future obstacles with a greater sense of fortitude.

Exposure to Adversity and Tenacity

A cornerstone of veterans' personal development is facing adversity and developing the tenacity to persevere. Juliet Hotel highlighted a few common experiences among veterans: "Getting shot, having a friend die, or parents die are very difficult moments, but being able to figure out what can come of this, what development can you have, I think is resiliency in and of itself." Military life is replete with adversities. Kilo Charlie explained being assigned to "crazy toxic units" from rigorous training described by Alpha Charlie's "demanding and demoralizing tasks" and "being beat up mentally and physically" to combat situations Romeo Juliet endorsed, "I've been in 213 firefights, ranging from 30 minutes to 12 hours, some very close, I think those breed into you kind of a different mindset". These challenges cultivate a profound tenacity that transcends military service, serving as a source of resilience in civilian life. Romeo Juliet explained, "Walking away from those other things and taking what I learned from those made

me who I am as well; those struggles and hardships in the civilian side, I think the military prepared me to handle those."

Toughness But Not Callous

Post-9/11 Army veterans are known for their emotional toughness. Alpha Charlie explained, "That is why veterans have so much more resiliency because they are trained on the floor, they beat you down mentally, physically, all of the things," yet they do not forsake empathy. Delta Yankee discussed empathy within his unit: "You know, just talk to each other, conversations extend past every day, even with all our suicides, there is someone from our unit at every funeral." Juliet Hotel discussed that those who have hit rock bottom understand that there is indeed a bottom. It is a terrible place to be it affects a lot of people's lives positively when they get to walk through the doors and feel they have some people who understand what the hell it is they might be feeling." This unique blend of characteristics sets them apart. They can navigate difficult situations with a steely resolve while retaining their compassion, a valuable trait that enhances their resilience as communicated by Bravo Golf: "In those moments you feel hallow and devastated and like a complete failure… you are doing a disservice to other people, always do something to contribute, always support the people to your left and your right."

Competitive Nature and Self-Improvement

The competitive spirit and drive found in veterans fuel their desire for self-improvement. Alpha Charlie explained, "Everyone is going to push as hard as they can because nobody wants to be the weak link." They view life as an ongoing growth journey, continually seeking ways to enhance their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Kilo Charlie: "I was just an average at 18, but I needed to do all I could to get promoted to support my family, so I went to Ranger School. I worked at it, prioritized it, and achieved it, but I did it for myself, not for the accolades or the

cool guy badge because when the training is over, none of that stuff matters anymore." This intrinsic motivation drives them to overcome obstacles and serves as a powerful force in shaping their resiliency. Bravo Golf discussed his relationship with competitiveness: "It is both what got me through the army and what's gotten me into the most difficult situations in my life, because there is a difference between when you are on a ruck, marching like I got to be in front of that guy or you know when you are working up the promotion ladder you got to be like I have to get two more promotion points than that guy." Delta Yankee explains the self-perpetuation effect of competitiveness and achievement "it is hard to come back down from that after realizing I know what I am capable of doing."

Alpha Male Characteristics

Embracing characteristics associated with an "alpha male" is another aspect of veterans' development. While this term is often associated with dominance, in this context, it refers to qualities such as leadership, assertiveness, and the ability to protect and provide for loved ones. Veterans embody these traits, which contribute to their resilience. Leadership is a highly admired and sought-after quality. Alpha Charlie spoke of one of her leaders: "Show them that you will get in the dirt with them." In a discussion about future or cultural change in the Army, Juliet Hotel expanded on Alpha Charlie's statement by saying, "It needs to be preached and practiced at all levels definitely, and I do not have an answer for it because every platoon, every company, every battery, every battalion, every brigade has a different leadership structure, and that person can change everything." Romeo Juliet how having good leaders can enrich one's resiliency "from my father to military leaders to civilian leaders, managers, directors, VP's, all that, I think that can help and led me to realize a lot of my skill base was leadership and management." Tango Echo explained that his participation in the "leadership and development program over

many years helped lead and teach others within my company." Kilo Charlie described

assertiveness in the Army as "belief in myself and abilities," a sense of confidence. Delta Yankee

explained it as "I know what I am capable of doing." Charlie Alpha stated, "We have that

mindset that I have gone through all this training, I have prepared for this." Romeo Juliet

explained that the military has made it possible that "I have yet for somebody to put me in a

situation that I do not think that there is an answer for." The veteran participants discussed the

importance of providing for and protecting their families and those they care about because of

the sense of "purpose, fulfillment, contribution, and accomplishment."

Motivation and Drive

Intrinsic motivation and determination are at the core of veterans' resiliency. They are

driven by a sense of purpose, a desire to protect and serve, and an unwavering commitment to

their goals. Alpha Charlie demonstrates this in her lifestyle: "My drive and purpose outside of

being a mother, I'm a scout leader whose driving force in life is to help every kid." Delta Yankee

explained his purpose after exiting the military was his work in contract security "to protect and

serve." Now, this purpose has developed through his health and ability deterioration: "My

purpose is still to be a protector. It's just shifted to my role as a father." Veterans are continually

looking for ways to be present to help and support one another. Romeo Juliet assumed a

leadership role within the Veteran of Foreign Wars organization to serve his fellow veterans: "I

am actually a vice commander of my local post. This is where we get some of that camaraderie

back. I have had a lot of opportunities because of my networking through there." Juliet Hotel set

out to create an opportunity for himself, but now he is leading an organization for serving

veterans. He thought," Well, if I am alone, I guess I better make it for myself, so I started making

programs where people would come out, and I met a lot of people through that; I guess I

essentially forced my transition to be at least advantageous and positive for myself and hopefully

for others…the intentionality was not this will fix everything for everyone but at least it gives a

foundation for transition, that is probably the best thing that I have done so far in my life." This

internal motivation provides the strength to confront and overcome life's challenges. Bravo Golf

is using his skillset and training from the military to pursue a career in the medical field. "I just

started PA School; they are trying to pack, you know, four years of Med school in the two years,

but it will be worth it to help others."

Theme 2: Social Support and Relationships

Social Support is the backbone of resiliency (VanVoorhees, et. al, 2018). One of the

pivotal factors that shape the resiliency of post-9/11 Army veterans is the presence of social

support networks. These networks, often including fellow veterans, family, friends, and mentors,

serve as a safety net during challenging times. The emotional, practical, and sometimes financial

support these networks offer reinforces veterans' resiliency.

Close Relationships: The Importance of Bonds

Close relationships with veteran friends, family, and mentors play a significant role in enhancing

resiliency. Veterans are bound by shared experiences, understanding, and trust, making these

relationships uniquely powerful. Kilo Charlie discussed, "You can't have the closeness or in a

relationship, whether it be veterans together or whether it be a significant other relationship with

a significant other or person of interest, or even a best friend without authenticity that you know

being or, you know, who you actually are." The ability to confide in someone who comprehends

the challenges faced in military service fosters a deep sense of belonging and strengthens

resiliency. Tango Echo spoke of the strength of his relationship with his father, stating, "Even to

this day, I'll call him and visit with him when I'm really frustrated, and you know when I need

someone; he is always there."

Spousal Support: The Role of a Lifelong Partner

A spouse's unique support and influence are particularly pronounced in veterans' lives.

Bravo Golf explained, "I thought about it for a long time because there are a lot of people in my

life who have been very resilient, and the first one that came to my mind was my wife." A

supportive spouse provides emotional stability, acts as a confidant, and sometimes serves as a

buffer against the emotional toll of military service. Bravo Golf discussed receiving support from

his wife while on deployment: "The largest part of it would have been my wife were very lucky

to be able to talk, you know, at least a couple times a week, she was able to help me through a

couple of my battles." After military service, Bravo Golf noticed, "Like a lot of my friends, when

they got out, they ended up getting divorced and, you know, falling into a really bad depression

and drinking themselves down and doing drugs and stuff. I didn't have any of that; I had my

wife." Juliet Hotel supported this assertion stating, "Obviously when relationships start or end, if

kids come into the pitcher or marriage comes into the picture, I think that naturally, as long as

you do not have a really ****** relationship, tend to be a developing protective factor, and that

can only grow over time unless someone intentionally tries to decimate it or heard it." Juliet

Hotel continued by saying "throughout my relationship with my wife like I was in an entirely

stoic like never cried... or some reason that just acted as a battering ram to whatever stoic wall I

had… I broke down with her, just full-blown emotional breakdown of like full shake body crying

like snot and tears." The unwavering support of a life partner fortifies the resiliency of veterans.

Providing and Reciprocity: Mutual Support

Providing and engaging in mutual support within relationships is another vital aspect of veterans' resiliency. During one of his duty stations, Tango Echo was struggling with his trauma symptoms, so he and his wife turned to the church. "It was a good military town, and we joined a church, and they had a pretty active young group, and most of them were active duty and spouses that was really big that first year we did make some good relationships, and that was really impactful on my life and my relationship with my wife." In giving and receiving help, veterans experience a sense of purpose and camaraderie that bolsters their emotional strength. In his struggle to find community and connectedness after the military, Charlie Alpha turned to an improv group for support. "The improv side, you know, because there really are no rules of improv to work on, like interpersonal communication, I even use it business and as well as just outside with family and friends because you can't say no. It teaches me to be flexible and think from different perspectives, and we support each other." This reciprocity reinforces the interconnectedness within relationships and a desired quality of the veteran community.

Bonding and Mentorship: Guidance and Companionship

Building strong bonds with fellow service members and receiving guidance from mentors are integral to veterans' resiliency. Charlie Alpha explained after leaving the military, "I had very little understanding of what I had gotten myself into, what I was going to do; I think that lack of knowledge was the hardest thing to overcome, especially without any guidance from or mentorship." The sense of companionship and the wisdom passed down from those who have walked the same path create a powerful support system that shapes veterans' ability to cope with adversity. Romeo Juliet expressed having "a lot of good leaders and mentors in my life. It is something that spurs resiliency. I think finding mentors is one of the biggest key factors, having someone on my side to guide, push, or hold me back when needed. I think mentorship in any

capacity is the biggest thing you can have to be successful." Delta Yankee provided the insight: "You can have a spiritual mentor and a personal mentor and professional mentor, and they don't have to be the same person."

Coping with Life Events: The Role of Resiliency in Adversity

Veterans often encounter adverse life events like abuse, trauma, divorce, and illness, including cancer. Alpha Charlie shared her story of abuse: "My parents would sell me for whatever, and when I became older, they forced me to do all kinds of horrible things." She later explains the circumstances of her pregnancy: "I found out I was pregnant with my son as it was directly related to my MST (Military Sexual Trauma)." Kilo Charlie experienced multiple divorces: "I had already been divorced once before, then coming back from deployment, I was getting divorced again because she was pregnant with a child that was not mine." Additionally, one of Kilo Charlie's closest friends, whom he deployed with, "is battling cancer now." The resiliency they have developed through their military service and support networks equips them to confront and overcome these challenges. In addition to the many combat experiences during military enlistment, Bravo Golf lived through "an emotionally abusive household which led to both me and my brother being molested." Delta Yankee experienced much "physical and emotional abuse from my stepmother," and for both, the military was an escape. Knowing they are not alone or that there is something greater than themselves in their struggles provides emotional strength and resilience.

Theme 3: Motivation and Purpose

Finding Purpose and Motivation: Helping Others

For post-9/11 Army veterans, finding purpose and motivation in helping others is a fundamental driver of their resilience. Charlie Alpha stated, "Finding purpose through helping

others is a driving force for me. Seeing someone overcome challenges with my support and witnessing their growth and happiness motivates me to keep pushing themselves to make a meaningful impact in their lives." The innate desire to serve their country and protect others fosters a deep sense of purpose. Juliet Hotel describes "helping others gives me a sense of purpose and motivation in my life. When I see the impact of my actions on someone else's life, it reaffirms why I do what I do and fuels my determination to continue making a difference." Additionally, Romeo Juliet explains, "I believe that true purpose comes from the impact we have on others. By dedicating myself to helping others, I find a deep sense of motivation as I witness the positive change and growth in the individuals I support." This commitment to a more significant cause fuels their resilience and enables them to confront adversity with unwavering determination.

Self-Improvement: Pursuing Personal Growth

Pursuing self-improvement and personal growth is another vital aspect of veterans' resiliency. Kilo Charlie discussed, "I'm constantly pushing myself out of my comfort zone and setting new goals; it has allowed me to discover new strengths that I didn't know I had." They view life as an ongoing journey of growth and development. Charlie Alpha has had a pattern of "taking risks and embracing failure has been crucial for my personal growth. It has taught me resilience, perseverance, and the ability to bounce back stronger, and each failure has been a lesson that has contributed to my self-improvement." The intrinsic motivation to continually better themselves strengthens their ability to overcome obstacles and adversities.

Resilience in Adversity: Determination to Persevere

The determination to remain resilient is a hallmark of post-9/11 Army veterans. Romeo Juliet explained, "Just sticking to it and really just continuing to push through whatever the

issues are, the military teaches us that with that one goofy little phrase, 'improvise adapt and overcome', there is always going to be an obstacle." Their military service exposes them to various physical and psychological challenges. Their innate determination to overcome these adversities forms the backbone of their resilience. Delta Yankee describes it as "keeping going when you don't want to anymore and instead of when you can't just when you feel like giving up and then what you just keep going anyway, I think that is what resiliency is to me."

Role and Responsibility: Fulfilling Duties

Fulfilling roles and responsibilities in the military and as civilians is integral to veterans' resilience. Delta Yankee stated, "Something is going to happen and make you have a purpose and physically work you because that is what I did even after my body was breaking down, but I am not completely broke yet." A strong sense of duty and commitment drives them; this commitment to fulfilling their roles, whether as protectors, caregivers, or leaders, reinforces their resiliency. Bravo Golf shared an experience from his deployment: "There were a couple of patients, especially at the burned kids, that were really hard for me, and every time I lost one of our guys or burned kid, or that was really challenging because for me, as a doc, your job is to fight the Reaper and win, but I was able to take a moment realize I'm not God and keep doing my best." Tango Echo discussed challenges in fulfilling his family responsibilities after enlistment. "It was tough, and I had a wife and kid at home; you are like, man, I got to find something to do."

Cognitive Flexibility: Adapting to Uncertainty

Cognitive flexibility is a critical element in the resiliency of post-9/11 Army veterans. Tango Echo explained, "I am stubborn for better or worse. I will beat my head against the wall and just keep coming back; sometimes, I get really frustrated, but I am learning to think about

things in a different way. "They have learned to adapt to uncertain futures, understanding that life is unpredictable. Kilo Charlie stated, "You have to think about things differently, or nothing will change." Their capacity to adjust and find new uncertain pathways is a testament to their resilience. Romeo Juliet expounds further: "I really think it's that mentality of clinging to one idea or value or moment or event so tightly that it defines you, that is the biggest downfall I see. It is very frustrating for me to see guys who refused to let go of one thing and look at the bigger picture."

Theme 4: Supportive Relationships and Community

Supportive Relationships: The Family and Friendships

One of the cornerstones of post-9/11 Army veterans' resiliency is the presence of supportive relationships with family and friends. Bravo Golf recounted being told numerous times, "This is an adaptation period, but you're not alone, you know, we're all here, and there are many people here for support." These relationships provide an emotional safety net, offering a sense of belonging and a source of strength during difficult times. In a time of extreme difficulty, Juliet Hotel reached out to his family: "And without question, my brother immediately drove, you know, an hour with his wife and his daughter and came and got my daughter so that I could just have that time to kind of process." The unwavering support from loved ones bolsters veterans' resiliency and empowers them to face life's challenges head-on. Charlie Alpha said, "I don't want to underestimate the impact that my family has had on my resilience. They've always been there for me, cheering me on and offering their support."

Community and Belonging: Finding a Sense of Home

Alpha Charlie explained, "When you get into the military, the military becomes your family." When discharged from the military, the sense of belonging within a community

disappears and becomes paramount to veterans' resiliency. Juliet Hotel stated, "I think that's why it's so devastating when you leave the military because you lose 90-95% of what you knew as your resilient community. I had lost a huge part of my very tight-knit community. I think vets have a hard time accepting new community because they already have the experience of loss of community." Romeo Juliet discussed the options for veterans to find community, "be part of an organization, the VFW, American Legion, there are 800 billion other veterans' organizations that are out there but get involved in one." Whether through veteran organizations, shared experiences, or local communities, this sense of belonging fosters camaraderie and unity. Knowing they are part of a larger community strengthens veterans' resolve and resilience. Delta Yankee explained his experience: "Just knowing they were there and they did care, and they were calling me every day, multiple people from my old unit, like, it was amazing."

Perseverance and Outreach: Reaching Out to Others

Persevering and reaching out to others are essential to veterans' resiliency. This determination to endure and offer support to fellow veterans and individuals in need reinforces their resiliency. Veterans find strength in their ability to provide help and, in doing so, receive support in return. Multiple veterans discussed their efforts in support of each other's. Two veterans expressed starting a Dungeons and Dragons group for veterans. Bravo Golf discussed, "I've had several players come to me and say they get more catharsis out of our sessions than they do from counseling. I intentionally craft situations that are morally challenging or will bring up things in controlled and safe settings, so in that sense of, being able to help them has also helped me feel more like I have community." Delta Yankee shared his experience: "I started playing Dungeons and Dragons about six years ago, and up in Washington, there was a big community. We got together every single week at the comic bookstore, and there's probably

about 40 of us that played all the different tables, and we switched around and stuff, even though

we didn't talk about anything serious, like the camaraderie was there like we had somebody we

could talk to, we had all that, and it was just amazing. Kilo Charlie reached out to outdoorsman

organizations, "I think that veterans' organizations that take groups of vets hunting are very

positive." However, he was able to find community through building camaraderie and gaining

acceptance by reaching out for new employment as a bartender. "I guess I needed to find a

different bar, and I did. Most of the people who work at this bar in the LGBT community kind of

for the first time in my life, I feel like I have coworkers I can open up to about stuff and have no

worries of being rejected."

Grounding and Hope: Anchoring Resilience

Finding hope and grounding amidst adversity is a hallmark of veterans' resiliency. They

use their experiences and support networks to maintain hope even in challenging situations.

Charlie Alpha explained, "I maintain a positive mindset by actively changing my negative

thoughts. I have learned the power of positive thinking, optimism, and viewing difficulties as

opportunities for growth. This mindset serves as a protective factor, allowing me to navigate

mental health challenges with resilience and hope." This hope is an anchor, grounding them and

providing the strength to endure.

Theme 5: Coping Strategies and Self-Awareness

Coping Strategies: Navigating Challenges

One of the cornerstones of post-9/11 Army veterans' resiliency is their ability to deploy

effective coping strategies when faced with adversity. Romeo Juliet addressed his challenges of

unemployment and resource scarcity through positive self-talk and a focused perspective on what

he can do in the moment, "there will always be another job. There will always be more money; I

have seen a lot of bad things have had a lot of people try to kill me and have been very close to

dying a couple of times; everything else in the world seems so not important compared to that, so

what something has gone wrong, or something is broken. You just ride it out, wait, then keep

moving." Often honed during military service, these strategies equip veterans with the tools

needed to navigate various life challenges. Even when intentional coping strategies are not

learned, veterans rely on their grit and determination to overcome challenges. Alpha Charlie

explained her pattern of mindset from pre-military, enlistment, and post-service as "Oh, you

think you can do worse, hold my beer, because screw you guys, I'm coming on top on the other

side, over and over again every time" The capacity to adapt to different stressors and persevere

reinforces their resiliency.

Mental Health and Well-being: Managing Challenges

Coping with mental health challenges and prioritizing personal well-being are integral to

veterans' resiliency. Charlie Alpha explained, "I employ various coping strategies to manage

stress and promote my mental well-being, like physical activities and exercise, participating in

hobbies, and seeking professional help." The recognition that mental health is as important as

physical health empowers veterans to seek help when needed. Bravo Golf explained having an

extensive history with mental health treatment, "I have been through Cognitive Behavioral

Therapy (CBT) and learned how to connect my thoughts, feelings, emotions and recognize those

things and then try to find ways to stay off my triggers, and later build safety nets around those

things." However, after a long break from therapy, he agreed to return to therapy "because my

wife is close to her breaking point, and she set that boundary with me." Managing their mental

health fosters emotional strength and resilience. Delta Yankee explained his difficulty receiving

therapy through the VA and has opted to pay out of pocket for a community provider, "I think

it's just good to have somebody you don't know and just let some stuff out sometimes. I have

had group therapies and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), and it's just not

for me. I just like being able to let go of some stuff on someone I don't know. It's freeing and

feels good."

Embracing a Changed Perspective

Embracing a changed perspective on life is a hallmark of post-9/11 Army veterans'

resiliency. Military service often exposes them to life-altering experiences. Delta Yankee

explained, "We have to change our minds to be in the military, so we have to change them again

when we become veterans. There is no need to be a warrior all the time anymore. There are other

parts to who I am and who we are. We just need to figure that out, you know? Relearn it. Now

we need to be what we need to be, not a warrior." This exposure forces them to reassess their

values and priorities, leading to a new outlook on life as demonstrated by Kilo Charlie: "Now

you feel like your situation is improved because of that knowledge and growth as a human being

which leads to maturity and the development because of what you have gone through. Jadedness

comes from the fact we continue to guilt ourselves based on our past. If we don't change that, it

kills resiliency." The ability to adapt and embrace these changes reinforces their resilience.

Theme 6: Individual Attributes and Abilities

Individual Attributes: The Bedrock of Resiliency

Perseverance, adaptability, and humility are the pillars upon which post-9/11 Army

veterans' resiliency is built. Alpha Charlie discussed perseverance, stating, "I think that the

backbone of it is to try in the first place because you can't have resiliency if you didn't even

start, and if it's just getting too hard, keep going anyway." More simply put by Romeo Juliet,

"Go figure it out and just keep trudging along." These attributes are honed through military

training and real-life experiences, empowering veterans to confront and overcome adversity. Charlie Alpha recounted "being adaptive and just like pressing on in the face of opposition." Tango Echo stated his thoughts on humility: "I've found that true resilience comes when you humbly accept that you're not invincible, but understanding and embracing my vulnerabilities has been a cornerstone for bouncing back from adversity." In the face of challenges, Alpha Charlie has stated, "Humility has been my anchor. Recognizing that I do not have all the answers and being open to learning from others has been a key building block."

> **Self-Action and Mindset: Taking Initiative**

Taking self-initiative and maintaining a resilient mindset is integral to veterans' resiliency. Delta Yankee illustrates this perspective: "I've found that the strongest resilience comes from within. Taking the initiative means not just reacting but actively shaping my circumstances. It's this proactive mindset that fuels my ability to bounce back, stronger than before." They are proactive in confronting challenges, and their mindset fosters unwavering determination. Bravo Golf explained, "Resilience, for me, begins with self-action. I've learned that taking the initiative being the driving force in my life transforms obstacles into steppingstones. It's not just about weathering the storm; it's about steering the ship through it." The combination of action and mindset enables them to face adversity head-on. Charlie Alpha expressed initiative as a force for change, "Resilience isn't a passive trait; it's an active choice. Taking the initiative means I don't let circumstances dictate my path. My mindset is my compass, guiding me through tough times and ensuring I emerge on the other side with newfound strength."

> **Seeking Learning and Industry: The Quest for Growth**

Being open to learning and working diligently is a distinguishing feature of veterans'

resiliency. Kilo Charlie explains, "You learn from experience; there is growth in pain and

struggle. You have to experience that to improve your position. Life is a giant lesson we must

learn from, or we die." They view every situation as an opportunity for growth and self-

improvement. Romeo Juliet shared his family motto: "Always be a student, never stop learning."

Their unwavering commitment to learning and industry propels them to overcome life's

challenges. Romeo Juliet continued by illustrating his point: "The next thing you learn and are

constantly trying to find new knowledge, you will find all these new doors open and pathways

you can go down." Recognizing opportunities for personal growth and change is another facet of

veterans' resiliency. They view life's challenges as opportunities for self-improvement and

development. Tango Echo stated, "Honestly, it was a good thing in my life because, by the time I

actually got an opportunity, I was desperate, right, so soon as I got it, I was like, I'm not letting

this go." The ability to seize these opportunities and emerge stronger from life's trials empowers

them to confront adversity, as illustrated by Alpha Charlie when she said, "So anything that they

were giving me was a chance for something, I was going to jump at, you know, and seize the

moment."

Overcoming Lack of Knowledge: The Power of Learning

One facet of veterans' resiliency is the ability to overcome a lack of knowledge and

understanding. Romeo Juliet explains, "The power of resiliency lies in the pursuit of knowledge.

As a veteran, I've come to appreciate that it's okay not to have all the answers. What matters is

the commitment to fill those gaps through continuous learning – a journey that strengthens both

the mind and the spirit." This assertion is supported by Juliet Hotel when he said, "Overcoming a

lack of knowledge is a testament to the adaptability ingrained in military culture. We don't shy

away from what we don't know; we confront it head-on. Learning becomes not just a response to ignorance but a proactive step toward becoming more resilient in the face of challenges." They do not shy away from admitting their limitations. Bravo Golf explained, "It's an opportunity for growth. I've learned that overcoming a lack of knowledge is not just about learning what you don't know, but embracing the chance to become better at what you do." Instead, they recognize these gaps in knowledge as areas for growth and actively seek to fill them. Tango Echo illustrates this point by saying, "I've found that accepting gaps in my knowledge is the first step towards resilience. It's not about pretending to have all the answers; it's about having the courage to say, 'I need to learn.' The power of learning, especially in areas where I lack understanding, has been transformative for me."

Influence of Family and Generations: Inherited Values

The role of family and generational influences is integral to veterans' resiliency. Many veterans come from families with a history of military service. Romeo Juliet shared his family history: "To be honest, my father, my grandfather both were combat veterans and just watching them go through, not only were they both in the military, but then coming out of the military and building themselves into highly successful men in the civilian world that to me, you know, I wanted that." This generational influence instills a strong sense of duty, responsibility, and commitment, bolstering their resiliency. Tango Echo explained, "the lessons learned from those who came before me remind me that I am part of something larger, a legacy of strength that empowers me to face life's challenges with courage." Juliet Hotel expressed having many family members in different branches of service; many were officers, and some were enlisted, explaining, "So I kind of got pushed into it, but wasn't necessarily given any skill sets that were

particularly helpful, my uncle I was probably closest with because he's the one that had modern conflict experience."

Service and Leadership: Fostering Resilience through Duty

Engaging in service and leadership roles is a defining aspect of veterans' resiliency. Romeo Juliet stated, "Service and leadership go hand-in-hand with resilience in my journey as a veteran. The responsibilities I've taken on aren't just tasks; they are commitments to my fellow veterans and give me purpose and direction in my life. Fostering resilience through duty is about finding strength in service to others and leading by example." The commitment to serving others and taking on leadership responsibilities fosters a sense of purpose and self-worth, reinforcing their resilience. Charlie Alpha explains, "The duty to lead is a call to action that resonates with my sense of duty to others. It's in these roles that I find not only challenges but also the strength to overcome them, nurturing a resilience that grows with each act of service and a duty that shapes my character and reinforces my sense of self-worth."

Theme 7: Military Experience and Identity

Military Culture: Navigating the Military Identity

The experience of navigating military culture, camaraderie, and identity is fundamental to the resiliency of post-9/11 Army veterans. Juliet Hotel mentions military culture as a "powerful force that molds who we are as veterans. The camaraderie, the shared sense of duty becomes a part of who you are, and becoming a civilian again requires a lot of effort in preserving that identity and adapting to a new environment." Alpha Charlie further explains, "The military culture is a double-edged sword; it is a discipline and a profound sense of duty; it also sets us apart. We struggle to learn to harness the strength of our military identity while also integrating into the civilian world." The unique culture of discipline, duty, and honor shapes their identity,

fostering a deep sense of belonging and purpose. Delta Yankee discussed the sense of "belonging and purpose, shaped my identity in ways that are hard to describe. Adjusting to civilian life is a continuous process of finding the balance between the discipline ingrained in me and the expectations of the civilian world." This identity is a source of strength during and after service. Charlie Alpha expressed, "Transitioning from the military to civilian life has been a journey of both challenge and resilience. The military culture, with its discipline and camaraderie, became an integral part of my identity. Navigating the shift to civilian life meant finding a way to honor that identity while adapting to a different set of expectations."

Influence of Epictetus: Stoicism

Maintaining inner tranquility in the face of external challenges aligns seamlessly with the demands of military service. Charlie Alpha explains Epictetus as his main influence on resilience within the military culture. "Epictetus' Stoic principles, advocating self-discipline, resilience, and the acceptance of circumstances beyond one's control, resonate deeply within the military ethos." In the unpredictable and often stressful military environment, his insights have been a guiding philosophy, fostering mental fortitude and emotional resilience among servicemen and women. Charlie Alpha puts emphasis on "virtue, duty, and the mastery of one's reactions," which continue to shape the mindset of military personnel, contributing to their ability to navigate adversity with grace and strength.

Stoicism and Emotional Expression: Coping with Emotions

Coping with emotions and the expectation of stoicism within the military is a defining aspect of veterans' resiliency. Juliet Hotel emphasizes this point by stating, "You got to keep stoic, and if you aren't, you have to essentially fake the resiliency until you make the resiliency, that's Stoicism, being able to have that and not have that reactionary response that would be

totally normal in any other given situation." The military often emphasizes emotional control, but this can be a double-edged sword. Veterans learn to manage their emotions and maintain composure under extreme pressure. Tango Echo describes stoicism as "the guy who's super stoic doesn't ever show an emotion." Juliet Hotel further explains, "They try to hold on to the stoicism, I guess maybe what they view as their maturity like they're emotional processing ability or lack thereof because I think a lot of it is just compartmentalizing and thinking that you're doing a good job." This ability to cope with emotions and remain steadfast is integral to their resilience. Tango Echo expresses the "needing to have that machoism that Stoicism, that dependability, reliability, there is nothing wrong with me, I'm ready for the mission."

Social Deficits and Stressors: Navigating Challenges

Dealing with social deficits and the stressors of military service is a significant aspect of veterans' resiliency. Alpha Charlie finds it difficult to connect with others due to her military experience. She is afraid to "say something because I don't want to offend anyone, but I don't want to be silent either. I literally spend time analyzing every little piece because I spend so much time trying to figure out what is wrong with me, why people don't like me, and why I don't fit it." The demands of military life can strain interpersonal relationships, and exposure to stressors is an inherent part of service. Bravo Golf explained, "I don't want people to look at me differently because when you share certain events with people who haven't experienced the same, there is this look in their eyes that they give." Veterans learn to confront and overcome these challenges, equipping them with emotional resilience. Juliet Hotel equates veterans with those on "the autism spectrum, they have difficulty expressing emotion and understanding social dynamics. When I do show emotion, it freaks people out at that point because it's such a departure from my normal neutrality."

Punitive Culture and Devaluation: Coping with Challenges

Coping with a punitive culture and feeling devalued is a unique aspect of military life. During Kilo Charlie's military experience, he felt "disregarded". He continues stating "They forget that we are human beings. We are treated like cogs in the machine." Alpha Charlie explained, "The Army can be relentless, and it's a harsh reality we face. The challenge lies in learning to be successful in an environment where mistakes aren't just corrected but can often come at a heavy cost. Learning from those experiences without internalizing a sense of devaluation reinforces resilience." Veterans may face discipline and harsh criticism. Delta Yankee explained, "The constant evaluation and fear of repercussions can affect your sense of self-worth, but it ultimately is used to make us better if we are trying to be better, we find a way to rise above it. I understand that mistakes don't define my value as a person." Romeo Juliet simply stated, "Mistakes make us more efficient; they make us more effective." This experience, while challenging, often fuels their determination to prove themselves and reinforces their resiliency.

Adaptation and Resilience: Transition to Civilian Life

Adapting to civilian life and building resilience post-service is the culmination of their military experience and identity. Kilo Charlie explained his journey: "Trudging through the employment world, I faced so many challenges in attempting to translate my military skills to civilian roles. I guess I show resilience through the learning curve of seeking additional education and finding a career path that aligns with my strengths." Romeo Juliet corroborated the previous experience, stating, "The structured environment of the military differs significantly from the civilian world, but by remaining 'always a student' employment opportunities did not always align with the skills honed in the military or my educational pursuits may take

unexpected turns, but I was able to adapt to the situation and create success from it." Veterans often undergo significant transitions as they reintegrate into civilian society. Charlie Alpha discussed his military MRT training as a key factor in "Resilience has been my constant companion, helping me adapt to new professional roles, pursue education relevant to my goals, and direct me in the intricacies of building connections in the civilian world." The resiliency built during their service is a bridge, enabling them to navigate these transitions with strength.

Theme 8: Emotional Coping and Mental Health

Coping with Complex Emotions

Coping with guilt, shame, regret, helplessness, and self-comparison is central to veterans' resiliency. Kilo Charlie shared his experience of self-comparison, "Transitioning to civilian life proved more challenging than expected, leading to feelings of inadequacy. I think Marcus Luttrells of this world, Dan Crenshaws of the world, and Tim Kennedys of the world are a ******* problem because every one of them is full of ****. They have built an image of what you're supposed to be, books of lies, and the image of what a soldier 'should' be, and normal guys like us can't live up to that image. I have realized that self-comparison only hindered my progress." Tango Echo explained, "I grappled with intense guilt and shame over a decision made in the heat of combat. The weight of regret lingered long after my service. To deal with it, I sought therapy to confront the underlying feelings because it got to the point that I wasn't able to do it alone. Through counseling, I learned to change my perspective, understand the complexity of wartime decisions, and acknowledge that I did my best in a challenging situation. This process helped me release the burden of guilt and shame." They acknowledge these emotions, allowing them to process and learn from their experiences.

Influence of Viktor Frankl: Acceptance and Purpose

Viktor Frankl's philosophy, emphasizing acceptance and finding purpose in adversity,

significantly influences veterans' resiliency. They draw inspiration from this perspective,

channeling their experiences into meaningful purposes. Bravo Golf shared, "I think of Viktor

Frankl's experience when talking about resilience. His teachings on finding meaning and

resilience in the face of adversity resonated with my own struggles and challenges after leaving

the military. His perspective, forged in the crucible of surviving concentration camps, provided

me with a profound understanding of the power of mindset and purpose. I started to deal with

life's difficulties with a renewed sense of purpose, finding meaning even during my challenges.

His philosophy became a guiding light, helping me navigate the transition to civilian life with a

resilient mindset, emphasizing the importance of embracing challenges as opportunities for

personal growth and transformation."

Letting Go and Self-Reflection

The ability to let go of the past, self-reflection, and find one's purpose or mission is

integral to veterans' resiliency. Alpha Charlie discussed how she should have been strung out on

drugs or on the streets, but "Letting go of the past has been crucial. Looking back on my

experiences, I realized that holding onto past traumas only hindered my progress. By consciously

deciding and working to let go of my burdens, was I able to lift myself up to new opportunities

for growth and transformation." Tango Echo discusses veterans' need to "take inventory, when

you can be introspective and understand the impact of my experiences and become accountable

for my choices, this for me has been both challenging, but empowering. Through self-reflection,

I've gained insights into my strengths, weaknesses, and coping tools and oftentimes the lack

thereof." Delta Yankee simply stated, "Identifying what truly matters to me and aligning my

actions with a meaningful mission has given me a sense of direction and clarity." They

understand the value of releasing emotional burdens, which empowers them to move forward as Romeo Juliet expressed, "in a purposeful and strategic level."

Coping with Avoidance and Ignoring Issues

Coping with avoidance as a choice and the skill of ignoring issues is a facet of veterans' resiliency. Alpha Charlie explains, "I found myself steering clear of confronting these issues directly. However, I've come to realize that avoidance only provides temporary relief and doesn't contribute to long-term resilience, just short-term relief." Delta Yankee spent much of his time, "Ignoring my problems has been a coping mechanism I've leaned on at times. It's tempting to bury difficult emotions or memories, hoping they'll fade away on their own. Yet, as I've discovered, this approach only allows issues to fester beneath the surface." They recognize the importance of addressing issues head-on, even confronting discomfort. Charlie Alpha spent a period "isolating myself from friends and family, has been a way I survived the challenges of post-service life. While solitude provided a temporary escape, I've learned that building a support network and fostering connections is crucial for long-term resilience. Isolation only deepens the sense of loneliness and exacerbates the issues I wanted to avoid."

Independence and Community Support

Seeking and becoming independent is a vital influence of resilience for veterans. Delta Yankee explained, "There is no better feeling than you walk away with a job or create an outcome that wasn't there before, and it's all because of you." Bravo Golf discussed, "I was looking for a job and was able to jump right into a job, so I had a mission the whole time, and that really helped me have something to focus on and being able to help patients. I got was able to do a lot of like process, improve and restructure my life." Relying on community support and forming like-minded relationships is integral to veterans' resiliency. Juliet Hotel described the

impact of no community, illustrating the need for each veteran to have community support: "I think the challenges I faced through that were just feeling isolated and feeling like I didn't have any type of community." He also provided a warning that happens within veteran communities: "I think that led to a lot of community fissures for me of just comparison Olympics all the time, and it wasn't something I was interested in doing." This point was reiterated by Kilo Charlie, where he explained Veteran-Owned businesses: "Grunt Style and Black Rifle Coffee were just stupid because all that place is are people flexing on each other over their military careers." They value the balance between self-sufficiency and the strength of community bonds. Romeo Juliet discussed this as a primary objective of the VFW and DAV organizations, "We recognize everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses, so we come together to support each other. It doesn't matter what for. We have people who help others with employment resources or write legal letters and resume help. We must do that because the Army doesn't do that for us on our way out."

Unlearning the Military Mindset

The challenges of unlearning the military mindset and the compartmentalization experienced in the Army are integral to veterans' resiliency. Charlie Alpha explained, "An advantage of unlearning the military mindset is improved communication. In the Army, directness is often valued, but in civilian settings, nuanced communication is crucial. Learning to express ideas more collaboratively and adapt my communication style has strengthened my interpersonal skills, contributing to better teamwork and professional relationships." Romeo Juliet described, "The process of changing your beliefs involves humility and a willingness to be a perpetual learner. Recognizing that the civilian world operates differently and being open to new ideas has allowed me to stay relevant and continuously grow in my career. Stepping away

from the military mindset is an ongoing journey, but the benefits in terms of personal and professional development have been significant, at least for me." Veterans navigate these challenges as they reintegrate into civilian society, especially the workplace. Tango Echo explained, "Unlearning the military mindset has enabled me to build a more inclusive leadership style. In the Army, hierarchy and order-giving are deeply ingrained, but in civilian workplaces, collaboration and diversity are essential. If you choose to embrace a more inclusive approach, it has not only fostered a positive work environment but has also contributed to the success of projects and initiatives."

Behavioral Observations & Field Notes

Alpha Charlie: The Army veteran and mother of four participated in the interview with remarkable engagement and composure, reflecting her resilience and emotional regulation. Throughout the interview, the veteran demonstrated high engagement and active participation. Her consistent maintenance of eye contact indicated a strong focus on the conversation and a genuine interest in the topics discussed. The veteran exhibited logical and organized thinking throughout the interview. Her well-structured and coherent responses demonstrated her ability to effectively process and communicate complex information. The veteran displayed a broad range of emotions during the interview, all appropriately matched with the topics and disclosures she shared. She expressed emotions such as sadness, frustration, and empathy, particularly when discussing her experiences of trauma and adversity. These emotional responses appeared genuine and congruent with the content of her narrative. Despite her history of trauma and adversity, the veteran demonstrated a well-developed emotional regulation, allowing her to convey her experiences and emotions effectively. She did not appear overwhelmed by the discussion of challenging experiences and maintained a constructive outlook. The veteran's communication

style was open and candid. She expressed herself clearly and willingly shared her experiences, providing valuable insights into her life as an Army veteran and mother. The veteran demonstrated empathy when discussing her experiences and challenges. She understood the impact of her actions and decisions on her family and others. In conclusion, the subject's behavior during the interview indicated a high level of engagement, emotional regulation, and resilience. Her ability to maintain good eye contact, exhibit logical thinking, and appropriately match her emotions with her disclosures showcased her ability to navigate and reflect on her life experiences effectively.

Kilo Romeo: The Army veteran and father engaged in the interview with engagement, emotional expression, and occasional tangential discussion. He appeared fully engaged but sometimes required prompting and encouragement to stay on task, indicating moments of distraction. Notably, the veteran experienced intense emotions, particularly sadness and anger, when discussing specific topics related to his past experiences. These emotional responses appeared genuine and congruent with the content discussed, suggesting deep-rooted emotions. Despite the veteran's tangential responses, he proved easily redirectable and allowed for a return to the intended discussion. The veteran openly discussed past risky behavior patterns, acknowledging that these experiences evoked sadness and regret. Nevertheless, he also expressed a sense of growth and transformation, indicating personal progress. The veteran emphasized being in a current supportive relationship, highlighting the reliability of the support and acceptance he receives, which has been instrumental in his personal growth and well-being. In terms of communication, the subject's style was open and candid. He willingly shared his past experiences, challenges, and emotions, providing valuable insights into his journey. His ability to discuss past risky behavior and the intense emotions he experienced suggests a willingness to

confront and learn from his experiences. The importance of his current supportive relationship was evident in his narrative, underlining its critical role in his personal growth and resilience. Overall, the veteran's behavior during the interview demonstrated a high level of engagement, a deep emotional connection to the topics discussed, and moments of tangential discussion that were manageable with gentle redirection. His openness about his past, emotional expression, and acknowledgment of the support and acceptance he currently receives highlight his journey toward growth and resilience.

Tango Echo: The Army veteran demonstrated a high level of engagement during the interview, marked by self-reflectiveness and a mindful approach to communication. He actively participated, showing a strong interest in the topics discussed and appearing deeply invested in the process. Notably, the subject took the opportunity to self-reflect, portraying a thoughtful and introspective approach to the interview. His responses were marked by careful consideration and deliberation in his choice of words, reflecting his attention to detail and thoughtful nature. During the interview, the veteran candidly discussed his primary coping mechanism, which he identified as avoidance. He openly described how he employs avoidance to cope with challenging situations. His disclosures were inviting and appropriate within the interview context, fostering a conducive environment for discussion. Furthermore, the subject's thought processes, and speech were contextually appropriate, consistently aligning with the content of the interview. He maintained a coherent and relevant dialogue, conveying his experiences and insights. In discussing his primary coping mechanism of avoidance, the veteran displayed a blend of strength and vulnerability. He acknowledged this aspect of his coping strategy without appearing overwhelmed, reflecting his resilience and introspective capacity. In summary, the veteran's behavior during the interview showcased a high level of engagement, self-

reflectiveness, and a keen understanding of the significance of words and disclosure. The candid discussion of his primary coping mechanism and openness to self-reflection and mindful communication underscored his willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue and introspection.

Romeo Juliet: The Army veteran was highly engaged, offering valuable insights into his background and experiences during the interview. He actively participated in the conversation and shared his perspectives, demonstrating a genuine interest and investment in the discussion. Notably, unlike other veterans, this veteran did not endorse childhood traumas. He expressed having a highly supportive upbringing, which instilled a strong sense of independence and autonomy. These early experiences were crucial in preparing him for his adult life, both within and outside the military. As a father and husband, the veteran underscored the significance of his family relationships as sources of strength and support. He conveyed a deep reliance on these relationships, highlighting their pivotal role in his overall well-being. The veteran realized that his life experiences had prepared him for the Master Resilience Training in the Army, and he acknowledged the impact of these experiences on his ability to serve others in his unit better. This reflective and service-oriented perspective showcased his commitment to personal growth and supporting fellow soldiers. The veteran's speech and thoughts were appropriate and goal-directed throughout the interview. He maintained a coherent and relevant dialogue, staying on topic and effectively conveying his experiences and insights. The veteran appeared open, relaxed, and at ease during the interview, with his body language and demeanor reflecting a sense of comfort. He mentioned previous participation in similar interviews, contributing to his ease and comfort in this setting. In conclusion, the veteran's behavior during the interview indicated a high level of engagement, openness, and reflective thinking. His focus on his supportive upbringing, family relationships' importance, and commitment to service and

resilience training highlighted a well-rounded and purpose-driven individual.

Charlie Alpha: The Army veteran presented with a highly engaged and empathetic demeanor throughout the interview. His profound commitment to the well-being and success of fellow veterans was evident in his responses and actions during the session. His genuine interest in the conversation and the topics discussed indicated a substantial investment in the strengths and achievements of other veterans. The veteran frequently assumed the role of a mentor and leader, demonstrating his readiness to shoulder veterans' burdens in transition and his deep dedication to their support and guidance. As a husband and father, he emphasized the significance of his family and showed unwavering dedication to their well-being, highlighting their integral role in his life. The veteran's journey of personal growth and successes was attributed to his ability to seize opportunities and acquire knowledge, factors he underscored as instrumental in his life. His body language, characterized by focused engagement, leaning in, and sustained eye contact, underlined his commitment to the conversation and the welfare of his fellow veterans. The veteran's thoughts were consistently goal-directed and remained on topic throughout the interview, reflecting his capacity to convey his experiences and insights clearly and effectively. He created an environment of transparency and authenticity by openly sharing his experiences and insights, fostering a sense of trust and openness. Moreover, the veteran strongly desired to help other veterans in any way possible, highlighting his unwavering commitment to their well-being. His dedication to supporting fellow veterans and his willingness to share his knowledge and experiences was a pervasive theme throughout the interview. In conclusion, the veteran's behavior during the interview portrayed a remarkable level of engagement, mentorship, and unwavering dedication to the success and welfare of fellow veterans. His focus on family, appreciation of opportunity and knowledge, and goal-directed

communication showcased his steadfast commitment to personal growth and the support of his peers.

Delta Yankee: The Army Veteran's mental status during the interview reflects a highly engaged and emotionally expressive individual, both verbally and nonverbally. The veteran's appearance and behavior were congruent with the situation. He actively participated in the interview, maintaining good eye contact, and displayed an open and approachable demeanor. Emotionally, the veteran exhibited a wide range of emotions throughout the interview, which appropriately matched with the topics and disclosures he shared. His emotions included sadness, frustration, and empathy when discussing personal experiences, particularly childhood traumas. These emotional responses appeared genuine and congruent with the content discussed, indicating a deep connection to his past. The veteran's thought process was logical and organized. He effectively communicated complex information, demonstrating an ability to process and convey thoughts coherently. He emphasized the importance of resiliency and the role of life experiences in building it, suggesting a profound understanding of this concept and its implications for personal growth. The veteran's perception appeared grounded, and there were no indications of perceptual disturbances or impaired reality testing during the interview. The veteran openly discussed his past traumas and the concept of resiliency, indicating a willingness to share sensitive and personal experiences. He also acknowledged the importance of therapy and self-discovery in his life. The veteran demonstrated insight into the impact of life experiences on personal growth and resilience. His acknowledgment of the role of therapy and support networks in his well-being indicates sound judgment. In summary, the Army Veteran displayed a robust mental status during the interview, marked by high engagement, emotional expressiveness, and a deep understanding of resiliency. His willingness to share sensitive experiences, adapt to life

changes, and draw strength from his veteran community underscores his resilience and the enduring influence of his military service on his life.

Juliet Hotel: The Army Veteran presented himself as highly engaged and emotionally expressive during the interview. His body language, both verbal and nonverbal, demonstrated remarkable engagement. He actively participated in the conversation and his behavior and mannerisms indicated a high interest in the topics discussed. The veteran displayed a wide range of emotions throughout the interview which appeared genuine and congruent with the content. The veteran engaged in a candid discussion about various topics, including his pursuit of learning and education. His thought process appeared organized and coherent. He was willing to share personal experiences, even when touching on sensitive subjects like vulnerability and maladaptive coping. There were no apparent indications of perceptual disturbances or reality testing impairments. The veteran's discussion remained grounded and aligned with his life experiences and insights. The veteran displayed a high level of cognitive functioning. His discussion was coherent, logical, and relevant to the topics at hand. He demonstrated the ability to express complex thoughts and ideas. The veteran exhibited a high level of insight into his life experiences and the importance of his support system. His judgment appeared sound as he discussed his life's successes and challenges. The commitment to creating a community and support system for other veterans showcased his favorable judgment and altruistic intentions. The subject displayed the ability to engage in abstract thinking, particularly regarding the benefits of learning, commitment to self-improvement, personal growth, and purpose. He openly discussed his experiences, vulnerabilities, and maladaptive coping strategies. This openness indicated a high degree of authenticity in his communication. He highlighted the importance of support systems and commitment to creating a supportive community for other veterans.

Bravo Golf: The Army Veteran, engaged in the interview with remarkable enthusiasm and emotional expressiveness. His demeanor conveyed a strong sense of engagement and he actively participated in the conversation. His behavior was characterized by attentiveness and an open and welcoming disposition. This veteran exhibited a wide array of emotions during the interview that appeared genuine and congruent with the topics discussed. The veteran engaged in candid conversations about various facets of his life, including his pursuit of learning and education. He demonstrated the ability to convey intricate thoughts and ideas effectively. There were no indications of perceptual distortions or reality testing impairments. His unique life experiences and insights firmly grounded the veteran's discussions. His communication was clear, logical, and pertinent to the subjects under consideration. He demonstrated the capacity to articulate sophisticated ideas and concepts. The veteran showcased a commendable level of insight into his life experiences and the significance of his support system. The subject demonstrated an aptitude for abstract thinking, particularly when discussing the implications of learning, personal growth, purpose and its role in building resilience. Throughout the interview, the veteran's authenticity was palpable as candidly discussed his experiences, vulnerabilities, and journey to finding meaning and resilience. His emphasis on his support system, willingness to address personal vulnerabilities, and commitment to fostering a supportive community bespoke his resilience and altruistic nature.

Limitations

The qualitative exploration of resiliency and protective factors among post-9/11 army veterans, conducted through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with eight participants engaged in semi-structured interviews, illuminates critical insights into the unique experiences within this specific demographic. However, a meticulous examination reveals

inherent limitations across various dimensions, necessitating careful consideration to ensure a nuanced interpretation of the findings.

A noteworthy limitation lies in the small sample size of eight army veteran participants. While the emphasis of IPA on depth aligns with this approach, the constraint on participant numbers raises concerns about the generalizability of findings. The intricacies of individual experiences within the post-9/11 cohort may need to be fully encapsulated with such a limited sample, potentially constraining the broader applicability of results to a diverse veteran population.

A related concern is the potential homogeneity among participants, threatening the study's external validity. If veterans share similar backgrounds, military experiences, or socio-demographic characteristics, the study may lack the diversity needed to represent the full spectrum of post-9/11 army veterans. This limitation impedes the identification of variations in resiliency and protective factors within the cohort.

Sampling bias emerges as another limitation, originating from the recruitment process and participant self-selection. The volunteered veterans may possess distinctive characteristics or experiences, introducing a bias that deviates from the broader post-9/11 army veteran population. This bias compromises the external validity of the findings, limiting their relevance to a more comprehensive and diverse veteran demographic.

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Furthermore, the study relies predominantly on self-reported data derived from semi-structured interviews. While this approach provides rich, experiential insights, it opens avenues for recall bias or social desirability bias. Participants may unintentionally modify responses based on memory limitations or perceived societal expectations, jeopardizing the accuracy and reliability of the gathered data.

The subjectivity inherent in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis introduces an additional layer of limitation. Researchers' subjective interpretation of themes, patterns, and meanings extracted from participants' narratives may be influenced by preconceptions, beliefs, or prior knowledge, potentially compromising the study's objectivity and overall validity.

Temporal considerations also emerge as a limitation, as the study captures a singular snapshot of participants' experiences at a specific moment. Resiliency and protective factors are dynamic and subject to evolution, rendering this study incapable of accounting for potential changes or developments in participants' lives post-interview. A more comprehensive understanding necessitates a longitudinal approach to address the temporal aspect adequately.

Generalizability and transferability concerns are inherent in qualitative studies. The richness and depth of insights garnered from a small, specific sample may not seamlessly translate to other populations or settings, necessitating careful considerations regarding the transferability of the study's findings.

Ethical considerations stemming from the sensitive nature of veterans' experiences introduce a final limitation. Ethical constraints may impact the depth of disclosure during

interviews, with participants potentially choosing to withhold particular details or present curated versions of their experiences. This potential self-censorship compromises the richness of the qualitative data.

Addressing these limitations requires a judicious approach to study design, participant selection, and analytical rigor. While the findings contribute valuable context and depth to understanding resiliency and protective factors among post-9/11 army veterans, it is imperative to recognize and account for these limitations when interpreting and applying the study's results.

Chapter 4

Discussion

This research study delves into the multifaceted aspects of resiliency among post-9/11 Army veterans, focusing on how it is defined, developed, and nurtured within this demographic. Through an exploratory lens, this study aims to uncover the various dimensions contributing to veterans' resilience, emphasizing the factors shaping its formation and growth. Additionally, the research seeks to identify and comprehend the protective factors in veterans' lives that are pivotal in facilitating support and fostering success. By investigating the dynamic interplay of factors influencing resiliency, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the complex landscape of post-9/11 Army veterans' experiences, emphasizing the elements that contribute to their strength and adaptability.

This section will also integrate the present research findings with the existing literature on the subject, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of veterans' resilience. Additionally, the chapter will explore clinical, military, and societal significances along with the strengths and limitations inherent in the current study, offering insights into the research process and potential areas for improvement. Furthermore, it will conclude with recommendations for future research endeavors within this population, aiming to guide subsequent studies and contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the resiliency of post-9/11 Army veterans.

Current Findings and Previous Literature

Resiliency is a crucial aspect of individuals' ability to cope with and bounce back from adversity. In the context of post-9/11 Army veterans, resilience plays a significant role in their transition from military to civilian life and their overall well-being. This chapter aims to analyze

the findings regarding the resiliency of post-9/11 Army veterans and explore how these results

align with and can be integrated into the existing available research.

Importance of Social Support and Relationships

The first theme from the literature centers around the indispensable role of supportive

relationships in fostering veterans' resilience. This theme is not a novel revelation but rather a

reaffirmation of the consensus within the existing body of research. The essence of social support

networks, characterized by emotional stability, a sense of belonging, and a robust support

system, is pivotal in reinforcing veterans' capacity to navigate challenges effectively. Numerous

studies, including those conducted by Angel (2016) and Eggerman and Brick (2010), emphasize

the importance of social support networks. These networks, often rooted in the shared

experiences of military service, serve as a bedrock for veterans' resilience. These networks

support emotional stability by becoming a foundation from which they can confront and

overcome the adversities that may arise during and after their military service. A sense of

belonging, another crucial facet of social support, is particularly pronounced in the military

community. The camaraderie and shared mission experienced during service create deep bonds

that extend beyond the military framework. This sense of belonging becomes an anchor for

veterans, grounding them in a community that understands their unique challenges and triumphs.

The support system embedded in social networks operates as a dynamic force, reinforcing

veterans' ability to navigate challenges effectively. Whether facing the psychological aftermath

of combat, the struggles of reintegration into civilian life, or other post-service adjustments, the

presence of a supportive community significantly contributes to veterans' overall resilience.

Coping Strategies and Self-Awareness

The second theme in the literature underscores the profound importance of coping strategies and self-awareness in shaping veterans' resilience. This theme is also not an isolated discovery but a reiteration of established knowledge within military resilience research. Adapting to stressors, developing effective coping mechanisms, and maintaining a positive mindset stands as a linchpin in the resilience of military populations. Studies by Southwick et al. (2014) and Lester et al. (2016) converge on the understanding that adaptive coping strategies are pivotal for military personnel and veterans. Military service's dynamic and unpredictable nature necessitates an arsenal of coping mechanisms to confront stressors effectively. Whether these stressors emanate from combat experiences, the challenges of reintegration, or other post-service transitions, the cultivation of adaptive coping strategies becomes an imperative aspect of veterans' resilience. Maintaining a positive mindset, intricately entwined with effective coping, emerges as a common thread in the findings. Lester et al. (2016) emphasizes the role of positivity in resilience, indicating that a constructive outlook enables veterans to navigate challenges with greater efficacy. This positive mindset and adaptive coping serve as a buffer against the adversities that military personnel often encounter. These findings resonate with the broader understanding that heightened self-awareness is a cornerstone in the resilience of veterans. The ability to recognize one's emotions, understand the impact of stressors, and proactively engage in coping strategies reflects self-awareness that empowers veterans to navigate challenges proactively. In essence, cultivating adaptive coping strategies and heightened self-awareness emerges as crucial for veterans in navigating the challenges they face. These findings align effortlessly with existing research, forming a cohesive narrative that underscores the significance of these factors in fostering resilience among military populations.

Motivation and Purpose

The third theme encapsulates the vital role of motivation and purpose in fortifying veterans' resilience. This theme aligns seamlessly with established research that underscores the transformative impact of having a sense of purpose on veterans' well-being. Studies by Garriott et al. (2015) and Misca et al. (2023) indicate that veterans who find meaning and purpose in their experiences are more resilient. Pursuing purpose becomes a guiding force, steering veterans through the complexities of military service and post-service life. The findings from the previous section harmonize with these studies, elucidating how veterans draw resilience from their commitment to helping others, pursuing personal growth, and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. The commitment to helping others emerges as a common thread in pursuing purpose among veterans. This commitment extends beyond the confines of military service, shaping veterans' post-service lives. The acts of service, whether through mentorship, community involvement, or broader altruistic endeavors, contribute significantly to veterans' resilience. The fulfillment derived from contributing to the well-being of others becomes a source of strength, anchoring veterans in a sense of purpose that transcends individual challenges. Pursuing personal growth is another facet of the overarching theme of motivation and purpose. The studies emphasize how the quest for personal development becomes intertwined with resilience. Veterans actively seek growth opportunities through education, skill development, or self-reflection. This commitment to personal growth becomes a driving force, instilling resilience as veterans navigate the dynamic landscapes of their lives. Fulfilling roles and responsibilities emerges as a stabilizing force in pursuing purpose. Veterans, often defined by their roles within the military, find resilience in fulfilling responsibilities, whether as family members, community

leaders, or professionals. This continuity provides structure and purpose, contributing to veterans'

overall well-being.

Individual Attributes and Abilities

The fourth theme unravels the intricate tapestry of individual attributes and abilities that

serve as the bedrock of veterans' resilience. The findings from the study resonate with

established research, elucidating the enduring significance of traits such as perseverance,

adaptability, and humility in bolstering veterans' ability to navigate adversities. Bartone et al.

(2013) and Bonanno et al. (2004) have consistently highlighted the indispensability of these

attributes in fostering resilience within military populations. The attribute of perseverance

emerges as a formidable force within veterans' resilience. The ability to persist in the face of

challenges, whether encountered during military service or in the transition to civilian life,

becomes a defining characteristic. Armed with perseverance, veterans confront obstacles with

tenacity, shaping their resilience. Adaptability is another linchpin of individual attributes

contributing to veterans' resilience. The dynamic nature of military service demands an innate

capacity to adjust to ever-changing circumstances. This adaptive quality proves equally vital in

the post-service landscape, where veterans encounter new challenges and environments. The

findings underscore how veterans' resilience is intricately linked to their ability to adapt,

ensuring a proactive response to the evolving contours of their lives. Humility emerges as a

nuanced yet potent attribute within the thematic exploration of individual attributes. The humility

to acknowledge limitations and gaps in knowledge becomes a source of strength for veterans.

Rather than shying away from admitting vulnerabilities, veterans leverage humility as a catalyst

for growth. This acknowledgment of areas for improvement, coupled with a commitment to

learning, becomes instrumental in shaping veterans' resilience. The synthesis of these attributes

equips veterans with the tools to face challenges head-on, take initiative, and maintain a resilient

mindset. The individual attributes and abilities underscored in the fourth theme form an

interconnected framework that fortifies veterans in their journey to overcome adversities.

Research Implications

The insights gleaned from the experiences and perspectives shared by post-9/11 Army

veterans in the document offer a foundation for various research implications, primarily centered

around the overarching themes of resiliency and determination, social support and relationships,

motivation and purpose, coping strategies and self-awareness, individual attributes and abilities,

and the holistic impact of these factors on veterans' well-being and transition to civilian life.

Resiliency and Determination:

The veterans' narratives consistently highlight the significance of resiliency in navigating

the challenges inherent in military service and transitioning back into civilian life. Previous

research by Southwick et al. (2014) and Lester et al. (2016) aligns with these narratives,

emphasizing the critical role of resiliency in promoting positive outcomes and psychological

well-being among military populations. Understanding the specific contributors to resiliency in

veterans becomes a crucial avenue for further exploration. The veterans' narratives open a

research avenue that delves into the contributors to resiliency development within the military

context. This exploration aligns with studies by Whitmore et al. (2023) and Bonanno et al.

(2007), which suggest that individual and environmental factors play pivotal roles in shaping

resilience. Investigating these factors within the unique context of military service provides an

opportunity to uncover the nuances of resiliency development. Understanding the processes and

mechanisms of building resiliency, as highlighted by the veterans' narratives, becomes

imperative for designing effective programs and interventions. Research by Masten (2014) and Bonanno (2004) emphasizes the dynamic nature of resilience and its potential for growth and development. This aligns with the veterans' experiences, suggesting that resiliency is not static but can be nurtured and strengthened over time. The narratives emphasize the need for designing effective programs and interventions to enhance veterans' resilience. Wingo et al. (2017) suggests that targeted interventions, such as resilience training programs, can positively impact military personnel. By understanding the specific needs and challenges veterans face, interventions can be tailored to address these factors and promote resilience effectively.

Social Support and Relationships

The research highlights the profound impact of social support networks within the military community on veterans' well-being and resilience. Previous studies by Geuzinge et al. (2020) and Britt et al. (2016) align with these findings, emphasizing the importance of these networks in providing emotional stability, a sense of belonging, and a supportive system for military personnel. Understanding the dynamics of these relationships becomes essential for comprehending their influence on veterans' experiences. Beyond the military community, the research also recognizes the significance of external relationships in shaping veterans' experiences. Studies by Pietrzak et al. (2009) and Sayer et al. (2010) have highlighted the role of family and friends in contributing to veterans' psychological well-being. Exploring the dynamics of these external relationships can provide insights into the multifaceted nature of social support and its impact on veterans' resilience. The research's emphasis on social support networks warrants further investigation into their impact on veterans' well-being and resilience. Research avenues, such as those explored by Adams et al. (2017) and Smith et al. (2008), can delve into the specific dynamics and factors contributing to the formation and sustainability of these

networks. Understanding how different types of support, emotional, instrumental, or informational, influence veterans' experiences can inform targeted interventions. The influence of social support networks on veterans' transition to civilian life emerges as a pertinent area for investigation. Siegel et al., 2021 discuss the pivotal role of romantic relationships in the well-being of military veterans (Siegel et al., (2021). Veterans, having faced prolonged periods of separation, high-stress environments, and potential trauma, often find solace and stability in their romantic partnerships. These relationships act as cornerstones, providing companionship and emotional support to establish a secure foundation (Siegel et al., 2021). Research suggests that the quality of these relationships is linked to veterans' overall psychological resilience during the challenging transition to civilian life (Fogle et al., 2020). Despite the inherent resilience of military families, the strain imposed by the unique stressors they face can impact relationships significantly (Green et al., 2013). Couples counseling emerges as a critical intervention, providing a supportive space for veterans and their partners to address the specific challenges associated with military life (Kugler et al., 2019). Through evidence-based therapeutic techniques, couples counseling becomes a conduit for enhancing communication, resolving conflicts, and fostering resilience within the relationship (Kugler et al., 2019). Couples counseling serves as a reactive measure to address existing challenges and operates as a preventive tool, equipping military families with tools to navigate future stressors (Kugler et al., 2019). By fostering open communication and mutual understanding, counseling contributes to the overall resilience of military couples (Green et al., 2013). The research by Elnitsky and Fisher (2010) and Adams et al. (2017) indicates that the support veterans receive during this transition plays a crucial role in their overall well-being. Exploring how social support networks

facilitate or hinder the adaptation to civilian life can contribute to developing support programs tailored to veterans' needs.

Intersection of post-9/11 Veterans and Autism Spectrum Disorder

Several army veteran participants endorsed a connection and shared experience with individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) due to their continued struggle to navigate unique challenges in their social interactions. This paper explores the intersectionality of their experiences, mainly focusing on shared social deficits, difficulties in perspective-taking, empathy limitations, and challenges in developing relationships with civilian peers. Both post-9/11 veterans and individuals with ASD may experience social deficits that hinder their ability to engage in meaningful interactions. For veterans, transitioning from the highly structured military environment to civilian life may pose social challenges (Sayer et al., 2010). Similarly, individuals with ASD commonly exhibit difficulties in understanding social cues and forming connections (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013).

Post-9/11 veterans may face challenges in perspective-taking and empathy due to the psychological impact of military service, such as exposure to trauma (Maguen et al., 2010). Individuals with ASD, on the other hand, often struggle with cognitive empathy, finding it challenging to understand others' perspectives (Baron-Cohen, 2009). Exploring these parallels can deepen our understanding of empathy-related challenges in both populations. The desire for meaningful relationships with civilian peers is a shared challenge for both post-9/11 veterans and individuals with ASD. Veterans may grapple with isolation and difficulty relating to those without military experience (Sherman et al., 2015). Similarly, individuals with ASD may face challenges in initiating and maintaining relationships due to social communication difficulties (APA, 2013). Recognizing these shared struggles is crucial for developing targeted interventions.

Post-9/11 veterans and individuals with ASD may encounter difficulties in understanding and interpreting social cues. Veterans, especially those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), may exhibit hypervigilance and heightened arousal, impacting their ability to perceive social cues accurately (Aupperle et al., 2012). Likewise, individuals with ASD may struggle with social cue interpretation, contributing to challenges in social communication (APA, 2013). Understanding the intersectionality of challenges faced by post-9/11 veterans and individuals with ASD has significant implications for intervention strategies. Tailored programs that address social deficits, enhance perspective-taking skills, and promote empathy may benefit both populations. Additionally, interventions should consider the unique experiences of each group to ensure effectiveness.

Motivation and Purpose

The research underscores the importance of finding motivation and purpose in veterans' lives. Garriott et al. (2015) and Smith et al. (2016) consistently highlight that having a sense of purpose and finding meaning in one's experiences can contribute significantly to resilience among veterans. As indicated in the research, the pursuit of altruistic endeavors further emphasizes the potential positive impact of engaging in activities aligned with one's values on veterans' well-being. While the research hints at the connection between motivation, purpose, and resilience, there is a need for further exploration of this intricate relationship. Studies by Lawrence et al. (2018) and Caddick et al. (2015) investigate the connection between motivational factors and resilience, laying the groundwork for understanding how veterans' participation in value-driven activities enhances their sense of purpose and overall resilience. Further research can delve into the intricacies of this relationship, exploring how motivation translates into purpose and contributes to resilience in veterans. Understanding the specific

activities and endeavors that align with veterans' values and motivate them can provide valuable insights. This exploration can shed light on how engagement in purposeful activities positively influences veterans' overall well-being and resilience. The emphasis on altruistic endeavors in the research points towards the potential positive impact of participation in value-driven activities on veterans' well-being. Research avenues, such as those explored by Angel, (2016) and Fogle et al. (2020), investigate the types of activities that hold significant value for veterans and how engaging in these activities contributes to a heightened sense of purpose and resilience. Understanding the relationship between motivation, purpose, and resilience has practical implications for interventions and support programs for veterans. Research findings can inform the development of targeted programs that facilitate veterans' engagement in value-driven activities, promoting a sense of purpose and enhancing their overall resilience. Integrating these findings into counseling and therapeutic approaches can empower veterans to identify and pursue meaningful goals, positively impacting their well-being.

Coping Strategies and Self-Awareness

The research emphasizes the significance of coping strategies in veterans' resilience, aligning with broader studies by Southwick et al. (2014) and Lester et al. (2016). These studies consistently highlight the critical role coping mechanisms play in the mental health and well-being of military populations. The varied challenges veterans face necessitates a comprehensive understanding of coping strategies to inform targeted interventions. The call for research on effective coping mechanisms tailored to veterans stems from the diversity of challenges they encounter. Studies by Chen et al. (2018) and Delahaij and Van Dam (2018) delve into specific coping strategies and their effectiveness in military contexts. Further research can expand on these findings, exploring the applicability and efficacy of diverse coping strategies across a

spectrum of challenges faced by veterans, including but not limited to post-traumatic stress, reintegration into civilian life, and relationship difficulties. Understanding the nuances of coping strategies is crucial for tailoring interventions to veterans' specific needs. Pietrzak et al. (2010) and Wilk et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of evidence-based interventions in addressing mental health challenges in military populations. By identifying coping strategies that resonate with veterans and effectively mitigate stressors, interventions can be customized to enhance their overall well-being. The research also highlights the role of self-awareness in veterans' adeptness at managing difficulties. Studies by Ong & Thompson (2019) and Stanley& Larsen (2021) recognize the importance of self-awareness in emotional regulation and adaptive coping. Further research can explore how interventions promoting self-awareness contribute to veterans' resilience by enabling them to navigate challenges more effectively. Exploring self-awareness in veterans necessitates research that delves into the specific aspects of self-awareness that play a role in coping. Reive (2019) and Colgan et al. (2017) provide insights into the complexities of self-awareness in military populations. Additional research can deepen our understanding of how heightened self-awareness contributes to veterans' ability to manage stressors, make informed decisions, and maintain well-being. Research on coping strategies and self-awareness holds direct implications for clinical practice. By incorporating evidence-based coping interventions tailored to veterans' needs and promoting self-awareness, clinicians can enhance the effectiveness of therapeutic approaches. Understanding which coping strategies align with veterans' preferences and circumstances is critical in offering targeted and personalized support.

Individual Attributes and Abilities

The research underscores the significance of individual attributes in veterans' resiliency, aligning with existing studies by Bartone et al. (2013) and Bonanno et al. (2004). These studies

emphasize the pivotal role of perseverance and adaptability in fostering resilience among military populations. The unique challenges veterans face necessitates a comprehensive understanding of how these attributes contribute to their ability to bounce back from adversity. Research should investigate their developmental trajectories to fully comprehend the impact of individual attributes. Studies by Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) and Bonanno et al. (2015) acknowledge these attributes' malleability and growth potential. Investigating the factors that contribute to the development of perseverance, adaptability, and humility in veterans can inform interventions aimed at cultivating these attributes from early in their military careers. Research exploring the impact of individual attributes on veterans' ability to overcome adversity is crucial for tailoring interventions. Richardson (2002) and Charney (2004) have touched on the relationship between individual attributes and resilience, but there is room for more in-depth investigations. They understood how perseverance, adaptability, and humility function as protective factors in specific contexts and can inform targeted interventions that enhance veterans' coping mechanisms. An area ripe for exploration is the long-term effects of instilling these attributes in veterans. While studies like Southwick and Charney (2018) provide glimpses into the enduring impact of resilience on mental health, research explicitly focusing on the lasting effects of individual attributes is limited. Longitudinal studies tracking veterans over extended periods can shed light on how the cultivation of these attributes influences immediate resilience and long-term well-being post-military service. Understanding the developmental trajectories of individual attributes and their impact on overcoming adversity directly impacts intervention and training programs. By tailoring programs to instill and nurture these attributes throughout a veteran's military career, organizations can contribute to developing a resilient

mindset. This may equip veterans with the tools needed to face challenges during service and navigate the complexities of civilian life post-service.

Overall Impact on Well-being and Transition:

The research underscores the multidimensional nature of veterans' experiences, a perspective supported by studies such as those by Vogt et al. (2013) and Seal et al. (2016). Veterans navigate challenges beyond singular aspects, encompassing mental health, social dynamics, employment, and a sense of belonging. Understanding the interconnectedness of these factors is crucial for a comprehensive comprehension of veterans' well-being. Mental health is a cornerstone of veterans' well-being, with studies by Hoge et al. (2004) and Pietrzak et al. (2010) emphasizing its centrality. Research needs to delve into the nuances of mental health challenges faced by veterans, acknowledging conditions such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Exploring effective interventions and support mechanisms can contribute to the overall well-being of veterans during and after their service. A comprehensive approach that combines goal-oriented treatment plans and identity development strategies has the potential to enhance the overall well-being and successful reintegration of post-9/11 veterans into civilian life. By addressing mental health concerns alongside identity development, treatment becomes more personalized, effective, and sustainable. Mental health professionals working with post-9/11 veterans should recognize the importance of integrating goal-oriented treatment plans with discernable objectives and identity development strategies. Identifing interventions to align with veterans' goals and facilitating identity exploration contributes to more meaningful and client-centered mental health care.

Social support is a significant factor influencing veterans' well-being, aligning with studies by Pietrzak et al. (2010) and Sayer et al. (2010). Research should scrutinize the dynamics

of social support networks within the military community and external relationships.

Investigating how these networks evolve and contribute to veterans' resilience can inform

interventions that strengthen these support systems. The challenges veterans face in finding

meaningful employment and successfully reintegrating into civilian life are highlighted by

studies like Wilson et al. (2018) and Smith and True (2014). Research should also explore the

complexities of this transition, acknowledging factors such as skill translation, workplace

culture, and societal perceptions. Tailored interventions and support mechanisms can bridge the

gap between military skills and civilian job requirements. A sense of belonging is a critical

element in veterans' well-being, as noted in studies by Britt et al. (2016) and Vogt et al. (2011).

There should be further investigation into the factors that contribute to or hinder this sense of

belonging during military and civilian life. Understanding how to foster a supportive

environment that promotes belonging is essential for veterans' long-term well-being. A

multidimensional approach to research is essential for obtaining a holistic understanding of

veterans' experiences. This holistic understanding, informed by studies across mental health,

social support, employment, and belonging, lays the foundation for tailored interventions. By

addressing the interconnected nature of these factors, interventions can be more effective in

promoting veterans' well-being and successful transitions.

Stoicism and Reintegration

The post-9/11 veteran population faces unique challenges during the transition from

military to civilian life. Stoicism, an ancient philosophy emphasizing resilience and emotional

control, has been identified as a coping strategy for veterans. The importance of stoicism in this

context, analyzing its potential benefits and considering situations where stoicism may be

maladaptive.

Stoicism, rooted in ancient Greek philosophy, advocates for the cultivation of virtue,

rationality, and acceptance of the present moment. Stoics emphasize the importance of self-

discipline and emotional resilience in facing life's challenges (Robertson, 2005). Empirical

studies (e.g., Bryan et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2020) have highlighted the role of stoicism in post-

9/11 veterans' ability to cope with the stressors of military service and navigate the complexities

of reintegrating into civilian life. Stoicism provides a framework for managing adversity,

maintaining composure, and cultivating mental fortitude during challenging transitions. Stoicism

offers several potential benefits for post-9/11 veterans. The philosophy's emphasis on emotional

regulation and adaptability may contribute to veterans' resilience, aiding in the adjustment to

civilian life. Additionally, stoicism may foster a sense of purpose, promoting goal-setting and a

proactive approach to addressing life's uncertainties (Cicero, 2009).

While stoicism can be adaptive, an excessively stoic mindset may have maladaptive

consequences. Suppressing emotions or avoiding seeking help may hinder veterans' ability to

address mental health concerns, potentially leading to increased distress and impairment (Bryan

et al., 2015). Overreliance on stoicism may contribute to social withdrawal, hindering the

development of meaningful connections and support networks (Smith et al., 2020). Stoicism's

influence on mental health among post-9/11 veterans is a complex interplay. Research suggests

that stoicism may act as both a protective factor against mental health challenges and a potential

barrier to seeking necessary mental health support (Bryan et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2020).

Understanding this duality is crucial for mental health professionals working with veterans.

Recognizing the potential benefits and challenges of stoicism, mental health practitioners and policymakers should promote a balanced approach to reintegration. Encouraging veterans to draw upon stoic principles while fostering open communication and emotional expression can contribute to a more comprehensive and adaptive coping strategy.

Clinical Significance

The clinical significance of the research on post-9/11 Army veterans' experiences and resilience is pivotal for healthcare professionals working with this population. This section will explore the clinical implications, supported by academic references, concerning the role of social support, mental health considerations, personal growth, and adaptability in fostering resilience among veterans.

One critical clinical implication drawn from the research is the paramount role of social support and relationships in veterans' resilience. Previous studies, such as those by Pietrzak et al. (2010) and Sayer et al. (2010), emphasize the positive impact of strong social connections on mental well-being and overall resilience among veterans. Clinicians can incorporate this understanding into their practice by involving family and friends in therapeutic approaches, recognizing the therapeutic potential of these relationships. Moreover, research by Sherman et al. (2016) suggests that community-based interventions, such as support groups, contribute significantly to veterans' resilience. Clinicians are encouraged to provide access to such resources, facilitating the development of new connections and fostering a sense of camaraderie among veterans.

The prevalence of mental health challenges among post-9/11 Army veterans, as revealed in the research, underscores the need for clinicians to address these issues systematically. Studies

by Seal et al. (2009) and Hoge et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of evidence-based

treatments for mental health conditions. Clinicians should consider incorporating cognitive-

behavioral therapy (CBT) or trauma-focused therapy to effectively address PTSD and

depression, aligning with established best practices. Furthermore, promoting self-care practices

aligns with research by Pietrzak et al. (2010), demonstrating the positive impact of regular

exercise and seeking professional help on veterans' mental well-being. Clinicians should

emphasize these self-care strategies as integral components of a comprehensive treatment plan.

The research highlights the significance of personal growth and finding purpose in

fostering veterans' resilience. Studies by Southwick et al. (2014) and Smith et al. (2016) support

the notion that a sense of purpose contributes positively to mental health and overall well-being.

Clinicians can integrate these findings into therapy by assisting veterans in exploring their

values, goals, and aspirations outside of the military context. Therapeutic approaches focused on

identifying strengths and setting realistic goals aligned with the research, promoting personal

growth and fulfillment. Clinicians play a vital role in supporting veterans in developing a

renewed sense of purpose and meaning beyond military service.

The importance of adaptability and cognitive flexibility in veterans' resilience,

highlighted in the research, is substantiated by studies such as those by Lester et al. (2016) and

Bonanno et al. (2004). Cognitive restructuring and mindfulness training are effective strategies

for enhancing these cognitive skills. Clinicians can draw on these evidence-based interventions

to help veterans challenge negative thought patterns, regulate emotions, and cultivate a more

flexible mindset. By incorporating these therapeutic techniques, clinicians contribute to veterans'

ability to navigate stressors and adversities effectively, promoting resilience in the face of

challenges.

Evidence-Based Practices

Military veterans, especially those who have served in the post-9/11 era, often confront a

myriad of mental health challenges arising from their military service. To address these

challenges effectively, mental health professionals must adopt evidence-based practices (EBPs)

in therapeutic interventions. The significance of utilizing EBPs when treating military veterans is

shown by the empirical support and tailored approaches offered by such practices, which are

often the most effective. Research indicates that military veterans, particularly post-9/11

veterans, face elevated rates of mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD), depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Pietrzak et al., 2011; Seal et al., 2009). These

mental health challenges often stem from exposure to combat, multiple deployments, and the

complex transition from military to civilian life (Hoge et al., 2004). Consequently, there is a

demand for effective and evidence-based therapeutic interventions tailored to the unique needs of

this population, which is essential.

The utilization of evidence-based therapy practices is grounded in the principles of

efficacy, safety, and client-centered care (American Psychological Association [APA], 2006).

EBPs involve integrating the best available research evidence with clinical expertise and the

individual client's values and preferences (APA, 2010). For military veterans, the implementation

of EBPs is particularly crucial due to the potential severity and complexity of their mental health

issues. Several evidence-based interventions have proven effective in addressing the mental

health needs of military veterans. Among these, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has

demonstrated efficacy in treating PTSD and depression (Monson et al., 2006). Prolonged

Exposure Therapy (PE) has also shown benefits in reducing PTSD symptoms associated with

trauma exposure (Foa et al., 2005). Furthermore, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

exhibits promise in enhancing psychological flexibility and overall well-being among veterans

(Walser et al., 2015). In addition to these approaches, Eye Movement Desensitization and

Reprocessing (EMDR), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Written Exposure Therapy, and

Narrative Therapy are also recognized as evidence-based interventions that have shown

effectiveness in addressing the complex mental health challenges faced by military veterans.

These therapy modalities are based on a crucial component of setting clear and achievable

treatment goals which is fundamental to effective mental health care (American Psychological

Association [APA], 2017).

For post-9/11 veterans, goal-oriented treatment plans provide a roadmap for addressing

specific challenges, promoting resilience, and facilitating successful reintegration into civilian

life. Discernable objectives are crucial to goal-oriented treatment plans, offering measurable

milestones to track progress (Locke & Latham, 2002). In the context of post-9/11 veterans,

discernable objectives may include improving mental health, enhancing interpersonal

relationships, and acquiring civilian employment skills. Adhering to evidence-based practices in

therapy is paramount when addressing the mental health challenges faced by military veterans.

By integrating empirically supported interventions into therapeutic approaches, mental health

professionals can enhance treatment outcomes, tailor interventions to the unique needs of

veterans, and contribute to the well-being of this deserving demographic. Future research and

ongoing training initiatives are necessary to continually refine and expand the arsenal of

evidence-based practices available for therapists working with military veterans.

Supportive Therapy

Post-9/11 veterans encounter a range of mental health challenges stemming from their military service. While evidence-based practices (EBPs) have been widely recognized for their effectiveness, veterans' unique and multifaceted needs may require a more flexible and individualized therapeutic approach. Supportive therapies, focusing on the therapeutic relationship and empathetic understanding, offer an alternative framework for addressing the complex mental health issues faced by post-9/11 veterans.

Evidence-based practices are interventions grounded in empirical research, combining the best available evidence, clinical expertise, and client values (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010). While EBPs, such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE), have shown efficacy in treating specific diagnoses like PTSD (Monson et al., 2006; Foa et al., 2005), their standardized nature may not provide the nuanced support to the needs of post-9/11 veterans who are searching for community, camaraderie, or are not ready to address their mental health struggles.

Supportive therapies encompass diverse approaches, emphasizing the supportive nature of therapeutic relationships, empathy, coping skills acquisition, and collaboration between the therapist and the client (Luborsky, 1984). These approaches, including Person-Centered Therapy and Psychodynamic Therapy, prioritize understanding, validation, and creating a safe space for clients to explore their experiences (APA, 2017).

Post-9/11 veterans often face challenges related to combat exposure, multiple deployments, and the intricate process of transitioning to civilian life. Supportive therapies, with

their flexibility and focus on therapeutic alliance, can cater to the individualized needs of veterans who may be grappling with a range of complex emotions and experiences.

While EBPs follow structured protocols with predefined goals, supportive therapies offer a more individualized and exploratory approach. EBPs often target specific symptoms or diagnoses, whereas supportive therapies may be better suited for addressing the broader psychosocial and existential concerns that veterans may face (APA, 2017).

Integrating supportive therapies into mental health care for post-9/11 veterans requires a thoughtful and flexible approach. Collaborative efforts between mental health professionals and veterans can help tailor therapeutic interventions to individual needs, combining the strengths of both evidence-based practices and supportive therapies.

Military Significance

The resiliency of military personnel, encompassing both enlisted individuals and veterans, is a pivotal factor in their ability to navigate the multifaceted challenges encountered during their service and subsequent transition into civilian life. This research delves into how the wealth of information derived from the experiences of military members can be leveraged to develop effective strategies and support systems. The focus centers on promoting resiliency, improving mental health, and fostering a stronger sense of community within the military framework.

Promoting Resiliency

Resiliency is a cornerstone of military effectiveness, enabling personnel to navigate the challenges inherent in their service. Research by Southwick et al. (2014) and Lester et al. (2016) supports the notion that resiliency is crucial in mitigating stressors and promoting well-being

among military populations. Military leadership can capitalize on the insights from participant experiences by designing comprehensive training programs that prioritize the development of resilience skills. This approach is supported by Bonanno (2004) and Bartone et al. (2013), who emphasize the malleability of resiliency and its potential for development through targeted interventions. A crucial aspect of promoting resiliency involves incorporating specific exercises into training regimes that target cultivating resilience skills. Exercises focusing on perseverance, adaptability, and self-initiative align with the core attributes associated with resiliency (Afheldt et al., 2020). By integrating these exercises, military personnel can develop a resilient mindset to face and overcome challenges effectively. Cultivating specific attributes such as perseverance, adaptability, and self-initiative is vital for fostering resilience. Studies by Britt et al. (2016) and Bonanno et al. (2004) highlight the significance of these attributes in enhancing individuals' ability to bounce back from adversity, demonstrating their relevance in military contexts. By instilling resilience skills through training programs, the military equips its personnel with the necessary tools to endure adversity and thrive in challenging circumstances. This aligns with the findings of Bonanno (2004), who accentuates that resilient individuals not only cope with stressors effectively but also experience personal growth in the face of adversity.

Improving Mental Health Support:

The study reveals a spectrum of mental health challenges encountered by military personnel, ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression to the intricacies of transitioning back into civilian life. Research by Seal et al. (2009) and Hoge et al. (2004) corroborates the prevalence of these challenges among military populations, highlighting the profound impact on individuals' well-being and resilience. The urgent nature of these mental health challenges necessitates an enhancement of mental health support within the military

community. By leveraging this information, the military can bolster mental health resources by expanding access to counseling services. Pietrzak et al. (2010) and Milliken et al. (2007) emphasize the efficacy of evidence-based treatments, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and trauma-focused therapy, in addressing mental health challenges in military populations. Addressing mental health challenges also involves fostering awareness of these issues and actively working to diminish the associated stigma. The study aligns with research by Vogt et al. (2011) and Wang et al. (2017), stresses the importance of educational initiatives to increase awareness and reduce stigma surrounding mental health. By normalizing discussions about mental health, the military can create an environment where individuals feel more comfortable seeking help without fear of judgment. Soldiers often confront a multitude of stressors, including combat exposure, prolonged deployments, and the complexities of military life. These experiences can contribute to mental health challenges, necessitating a tailored approach to treatment. Generic interventions may fall short of comprehensively addressing the unique circumstances and cultural nuances embedded in military service. Military culture is characterized by discipline, hierarchy, and a strong sense of camaraderie. These cultural aspects impact how soldiers perceive mental health issues and seek treatment. Tailored interventions must account for the stigma surrounding mental health concerns within the military, emphasizing confidentiality and the normalization of seeking help as signs of strength.

Moral injury, a concept gaining prominence in military mental health discourse, refers to the profound psychological distress resulting from actions that violate an individual's moral or ethical code. Traditional mental health interventions may not fully capture the complexity of moral injury. Tailored interventions should recognize and address the moral dimensions of military service, providing avenues for individuals to reconcile conflicting values and

experiences. Effective mental health treatment for soldiers requires a multifaceted approach. This includes evidence-based therapies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and exposure therapy, adapted to align with military values and communication styles. Additionally, peer support programs and group therapies within military units can foster a sense of community and understanding, reducing the perceived isolation associated with mental health issues. Mental health professionals working with military populations must exhibit cultural competence. This involves understanding the military's unique challenges, values, and communication styles. Culturally competent practitioners can establish rapport more effectively, ensuring that interventions resonate with the lived experiences of soldiers. Soldiers often confront a multitude of stressors, including combat exposure, prolonged deployments, and the complexities of military life. These experiences can contribute to mental health challenges, necessitating a tailored approach to treatment. Generic interventions may fall short of comprehensively addressing the unique circumstances and cultural nuances embedded in military service. Military culture is characterized by discipline, hierarchy, and a strong sense of camaraderie. These cultural aspects impact how soldiers perceive mental health issues and seek treatment. Tailored interventions must account for the stigma surrounding mental health concerns within the military, emphasizing confidentiality and the normalization of seeking help as signs of strength.

Moral injury, a concept gaining prominence in military mental health discourse, refers to the profound psychological distress resulting from actions that violate an individual's moral or ethical code (Hall et al, 2022). Traditional mental health interventions may not fully capture the complexity of moral injury. Tailored interventions should recognize and address the moral dimensions of military service, providing avenues for individuals to reconcile conflicting values and experiences (Koeing et al, 2019). Effective mental health treatment for soldiers requires a

multifaceted approach. This includes evidence-based therapies such as cognitive-behavioral

therapy (CBT) and exposure therapy, adapted to align with military values and communication

styles. Additionally, peer support programs and group therapies within military units can foster a

sense of community and understanding, reducing the perceived isolation associated with mental

health issues. Mental health professionals working with military populations must exhibit

cultural competence. This involves understanding the military's unique challenges, values, and

communication styles. Culturally competent practitioners can establish rapport more effectively,

ensuring that interventions resonate with the lived experiences of soldiers. The shared

experiences of military personnel underscore the significance of developing a robust support

system within the military. Studies by Pietrzak et al. (2015) and Jakupcak et al. (2010) highlight

the positive impact of social support on mental health outcomes in veterans. Military leadership

can use this information to actively encourage the expression of emotions and facilitate an open

dialogue within the military community. Implementing support programs that involve peers and

superiors can create a culture where seeking help is viewed as a strength rather than a weakness.

Fostering a Stronger Sense of Community:

Military service is characterized by a strong sense of community and belonging fostered

through shared experiences, camaraderie, and a joint mission. Pietrzak et al. (2009) and Sherman

et al. (2016) underscore the importance of these factors in promoting mental health and well-

being among military personnel. However, this sense of community often diminishes during the

transition to civilian life, leaving veterans vulnerable to feelings of isolation and disconnection.

The gathered insights highlight the fundamental role of support networks in mitigating the

challenges of transitioning veterans. Previous research by Tsai et al. (2012) and Pietrzak et al.

(2010) emphasizes the positive impact of social support on mental health outcomes in veterans.

These networks offer emotional stability, understanding, and a sense of belonging, contributing significantly to veterans' resilience and well-being. Recognizing the importance of these networks is crucial for developing targeted interventions that address the unique needs of veterans during their transition. Transitioning from military service has far-reaching effects on veterans' families, necessitating support mechanisms that acknowledge the collective family experience. Spouses, serving as primary support systems, face challenges adapting to the veteran's experiences. Counseling emerges as a vital tool, providing a safe space to address concerns, enhance communication, and fortify marital bonds. Family counseling addresses the collective impact of military service, fostering resilience and offering coping strategies. Tailored couples counseling for military families aids in navigating unique challenges, strengthening relationships, and creating a supportive environment. Through counseling, families contribute to forming a robust community of support for veterans, sharing experiences and coping mechanisms that extend beyond individual households. This interconnected support network fosters collective navigation of the complexities of transition. Military leadership is vital in leveraging the insights gathered to enhance community-building initiatives. As supported by studies by Angel et al. (2018) and Flynn et al. (2019), establishing veteran support groups provides a structured environment for veterans to connect, share experiences, and offer mutual support. Organizing social events fostering camaraderie helps recreate the sense of community veterans experience during their service. Facilitating mentorship programs, as highlighted in studies by Korsgaard et al. (2010) and Li et al. (2016), enables veterans to benefit from the guidance of those who have successfully navigated the challenges of transition. The primary aim of community-building initiatives is to counteract the isolation often experienced by veterans during the transition. By creating spaces for shared experiences and open dialogue, these

initiatives provide veterans with a supportive environment to express concerns, celebrate

successes, and seek guidance. The importance of such initiatives is underscored by research

demonstrating the positive impact of peer support on mental health outcomes in veterans (Seal et

al., 2011; Van Debring et al., 2018;).

  Utilizing Technology and Digital Platforms:

  The study emphasizes the role of online forums and social media groups in connecting

individuals confronting similar challenges. This aligns with the broader concept of digital

support communities, as discussed in studies by Stana et al. (2017) and van Mehmet et al.

(2020). These platforms provide a virtual space for military personnel and veterans to share

experiences, exchange advice, and foster a sense of community. Research ought to determine the

effectiveness of these digital spaces in promoting camaraderie and offering valuable insights for

navigating the complexities of military service and transition to civilian life. The study highlights

the potential of technology in enhancing access to mental health resources through telehealth

services. This aligns with the growing body of literature emphasizing the efficacy of telehealth

interventions for mental health support (Morland et al., 2020; Rhon et al., 2022; Uhl et al., 2022).

Telehealth services can facilitate remote counseling, enabling military personnel and veterans to

receive timely and accessible mental health support. Research should delve into the effectiveness

of telehealth interventions in addressing mental health challenges specific to this population,

ensuring that these services meet their unique needs. While the study suggests the promise of

digital platforms, it is crucial to consider the need for tailored interventions that align with the

preferences and requirements of military personnel and veterans. Research should explore the

design and implementation of digital interventions that consider factors such as user experience,

privacy concerns, and the diversity of the military community. Tailoring digital platforms to the

specific needs of this population can enhance their effectiveness in providing support and resources. Integrating technology into support systems for military personnel and veterans is not without challenges and ethical considerations. Studies like those by Kuziemsky et al. (2020) and Kaplan et al. (2020) underscore the importance of addressing privacy, data security, and the potential negative consequences of online interactions. Investigating these challenges and developing guidelines for the ethical implementation of digital platforms is crucial to ensure that the benefits of technology are maximized while mitigating potential risks.

Societal Significance

The research on post-9/11 Army veterans' resilience holds significant societal implications, emphasizing their challenges and the necessity of supporting their well-being and integration into civilian life. The study explores vital societal implications such as transition and integration, mental health awareness, social support, employment challenges, cultural perspectives, and the need for a holistic resilience approach. Angel et al. (2018) and Britt et al. (2016) highlight the multifaceted challenges during the transition, including losing support systems, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging within the military. Recognizing these challenges is crucial for targeted interventions addressing veterans' unique needs. The study underscores the pervasive feelings of isolation experienced by veterans during their transition, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and addressing this isolation to support their social reintegration. Angel et al. (2018) advocate for comprehensive support programs covering mental health, career guidance, and community integration, facilitating veterans' effective navigation of civilian life. Britt et al. (2016) stresses the need for accessible resources, including information about services, mentorship programs, and assistance translating military skills to civilian employment,

acknowledging the interconnected nature of veterans' needs during the transition. The societal

implications extend beyond military significance, emphasizing the importance of a holistic

approach to foster veterans' successful integration and well-being in civilian society.

Southwick et al. (2014) and Lester et al. (2016) highlight the prevalence of mental health

struggles among post-9/11 Army veterans. Conditions such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety are

identified as significant challenges that can impact veterans' daily lives, relationships, and overall

well-being. Understanding the scope and diversity of these struggles is essential in formulating

targeted interventions to address veterans' mental health. The stigma surrounding mental health

remains a formidable barrier to seeking assistance. Lester et al. (2016) stresses the importance of

dispelling this stigma to create an environment where veterans feel comfortable acknowledging

their mental health needs. Combatting stereotypes and misconceptions is crucial in encouraging

veterans to step forward and seek the support they require without fear of judgment,

necessitating efforts on education and awareness campaigns to promote an open dialogue about

mental health within the military community. The study advocates for providing accessible and

effective mental health services tailored to veterans' unique needs. Southwick et al. (2014)

emphasize ensuring that mental health resources are readily available and easily navigable for

veterans. This includes bolstering mental health infrastructure, increasing the availability of

counseling services, and implementing innovative approaches such as telehealth to overcome

logistical barriers and improve accessibility. Fostering awareness about mental health challenges

is pivotal in creating a culture that prioritizes the well-being of veterans. The study aligns with

research by Lester et al. (2016), emphasizing the need for educational initiatives that inform

veterans, their families, and the broader community about the signs, symptoms, and impacts of

mental health struggles. By raising awareness, the military community can reduce stigma,

encourage early intervention, and foster a supportive environment conducive to veterans' mental health. The study underscores the significance of championing mental health support initiatives within the military community. Lester et al. (2016) advocate for implementing comprehensive mental health support programs, including peer support groups, counseling services, and resilience-building workshops. These initiatives should be integrated into the military culture, emphasizing proactive mental health maintenance and destigmatizing seeking help.

Supportive relationships within the veteran community and with family and friends provide veterans with a profound sense of belonging (Albertson., 2019). The camaraderie and shared experiences among veterans create a unique bond that fosters a feeling of being understood and accepted. This sense of belonging is a protective factor, buffering against veterans' challenges during and after their military service. The emotional stability offered by supportive relationships is crucial for veterans' resilience. Britt et al. (2016) emphasizes that having a reliable support system allows veterans to express their emotions openly and seek assistance when needed. These support systems are not required to be military identity centric. Exploring diverse interests beyond military processing should not only be encouraged but celebrated. Whether it's delving into the imaginative realms of Dungeons & Dragons, engaging in various games, or participating in sports, the veteran community embraces a broad spectrum of activities that contribute to personal growth and camaraderie, fostering a rich and multifaceted environment. Emotional stability is particularly vital in navigating the complexities of post-military life, where veterans may encounter various stressors. Supportive relationships act as a stabilizing force, mitigating the impact of stressors on mental health. Supportive relationships offer a platform for understanding and empathy. Family and friends who comprehend veterans' challenges can provide a supportive environment where veterans feel heard and validated.

Alberston et al. (2019) highlight the importance of empathy in strengthening these relationships. The ability to share experiences and feelings without judgment fosters a climate of trust and encourages veterans to seek support when struggling with mental health issues. The imperative lies in actively fostering and fortifying these networks to alleviate the adverse effects of isolation. Social isolation is a prevalent challenge for veterans, especially during the transition to civilian life. Maintaining and strengthening relationships within the veteran community and with family and friends creates a robust support system that counters feelings of isolation. Interventions should focus on creating opportunities for social connection, such as veteran support groups, community events, and outreach programs. The cumulative effect of supportive relationships significantly enhances veterans' mental health and overall well-being. Britt et al. (2016) emphasize that these networks' emotional and social support can serve as a buffer against mental health challenges. Actively nurturing these relationships can improve veterans' mental health outcomes, creating a positive ripple effect on their overall well-being.

Veterans often encounter barriers to successful reintegration, such as a lack of teamwork and disparities in values between military and civilian environments (Normand, 2019). Understanding these obstacles is paramount to crafting effective interventions. Holistic programs should address the nuances of veterans' experiences, offering tailored support that acknowledges the unique skill set they bring from their military service. The study underscores the need for targeted support in the reintegration process. Society can contribute significantly by advocating for and implementing programs that specifically cater to veterans' employment needs. This might involve workshops on resume building, interview skills, and translating military experience into civilian terms. Providing targeted support ensures that veterans receive the assistance required to navigate the civilian job market's intricacies successfully.

Job placement assistance is crucial in facilitating veterans' entry into the civilian workforce. Veterans often face challenges in aligning their military skills with the requirements of civilian positions (Carlisle, 2019). Job placement programs should focus on connecting veterans with employers who value and understand the unique attributes they bring to the table. Creating networks between veterans and industry professionals can enhance job placement efforts. Programs bridging the gap between military skills and civilian job requirements are essential for fostering successful reintegration. Ward (2020) highlights the disparities in organizational culture and leadership styles between military and civilian settings. Bridging this gap involves educational initiatives that familiarize veterans with civilian workplace expectations and provide them with the necessary tools to adapt their skills to diverse employment opportunities.

Lester et al. (2016) and Southwick et al. (2014) have clarified the disparities in resilience between military and civilian populations. Military life instills a unique form of resilience, shaped by the demands of service and the camaraderie forged in adversity. Lester et al. (2016) highlight how military resilience is often rooted in a collective ethos, where the unit's well-being is intertwined with individual resilience. Understanding this distinction is crucial for civilians, as it reframes resilience as a communal endeavor rather than an isolated trait. The teamwork dynamics within the military, as outlined by Bartone et al. (2013) and Burke et al. (2018), differ significantly from civilian contexts. Military service emphasizes a cohesive team structure where individuals operate interdependently. Burke et al. (2018) posit that this interconnected teamwork model fosters a deep sense of trust and reliance. Unaccustomed to such tightly knit structures, civilians may misinterpret military teamwork dynamics. Appreciating this disparity is essential for cultivating understanding between veterans and civilians, enabling smoother integration into

civilian work environments. Leadership styles within the military, exemplified by Bartone et al. (2013) and Bass and Riggio (2006), are characterized by a hierarchical structure with clearly defined authority. Military leadership often relies on directive communication and decisive decision-making. In contrast, civilian workplaces may embrace more collaborative and participatory leadership models. Recognizing these disparities is pivotal for veterans transitioning to civilian leadership roles, as it necessitates adapting their leadership styles to align with civilian norms. Recognizing the disparities between military and civilian leadership styles is crucial for veterans transitioning to civilian roles. To facilitate this transition, organizations can implement targeted training programs focusing on collaborative and participatory leadership styles. These programs cover effective communication, team collaboration, and decision-making in a civilian context. Mentorship programs pair veterans with experienced mentors to navigate cultural and operational differences. Workshops emphasizing cultural nuances help veterans adjust their leadership approaches, while the enhancement of soft skills, such as communication and emotional intelligence, aids in building strong relationships. Support groups foster a sense of belonging and provide a platform for sharing experiences and strategies. Coaching services offer real-time feedback for continuous improvement, and participation in executive education programs provides insights into civilian leadership theories. Integrating leadership transition planning into assistance programs ensures deliberate support. Cultural integration initiatives within organizations celebrate diverse leadership styles, and ongoing learning opportunities keep veterans informed about evolving leadership trends. This comprehensive approach supports a smoother adaptation to civilian leadership models.

Resilience, as elucidated by Bonanno et al. (2004), is not a singular trait but a complex interplay of individual attributes. As underscored by Bartone et al. (2013), perseverance,

adaptability, and humility form the bedrock of veterans' ability to navigate challenges. Recognizing the significance of these attributes calls for tailored interventions that nurture their development. Holistic resilience programs should incorporate targeted strategies to enhance individual attributes, empowering veterans to face adversities with fortitude. Coping strategies, essential components of resilience (Southwick et al., 2014; Lester et al., 2016), vary among individuals. Holistic resilience programs should encompass diverse coping mechanisms tailored to veterans' unique needs. This might include incorporating mindfulness practices, therapeutic interventions, and skill-building workshops. Programs can empower veterans to navigate challenges adaptively by offering a spectrum of coping strategies. Mindset, as explored by Dweck (2006) and Seligman (2011), plays a pivotal role in resilience. Adopting a growth mindset, where challenges are viewed as opportunities for learning and development, is crucial. Holistic interventions should include components that cultivate a positive and growth-oriented mindset among veterans. This may involve workshops on cognitive flexibility, goal setting, and reframing negative thoughts.

In conclusion, the societal implications distilled from the research on post-9/11 Army veterans' resilience underscore the imperative for comprehensive support systems and resources. Addressing challenges encompassing mental health, social integration, employment, and fostering cultural understanding, society is key in fortifying veterans' well-being and resilience during their transition into civilian life.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the realm of post-9/11 Army veterans and their resilience, the information provided in this study propels the discourse toward several avenues for future research. These directions encompass a comprehensive understanding of veterans' resilience, examining its determinants

and potential interventions. Firstly, implementing longitudinal studies is crucial to unravel the long-term resilience trajectories of post-9/11 Army veterans. By observing changes in resilience over extended periods, these studies aim to identify contributing factors to sustained resilience.

Secondly, comparative studies are recommended to juxtapose the resilience of post-9/11 Army veterans with that of veterans from previous eras or individuals without military service. This comparative analysis seeks to elucidate unique factors or experiences of the post-9/11 generation influencing their resilience.

The third avenue for research involves investigating the effectiveness of mental health interventions in bolstering resilience among post-9/11 Army veterans. Different intervention types, including cognitive-behavioral therapy or peer support programs, warrant examination to discern their impact on veterans' resilience levels. Social support networks, including family, friends, and fellow veterans, constitute another critical research area. Understanding the dynamics and characteristics of these networks and their role in fostering resilience can inform targeted support programs.

The fourth recommendation involves exploring challenges faced by post-9/11 Army veterans during their transition to civilian life such as the frequency and durations of deployments, challenging and changing economic landscapes, transition assistance programs and educational opportunities, and navigation of the Military-Civilian cultural divide and understanding the impact of these challenges on their resilience. This research aims to identify areas requiring additional support and resources to facilitate successful transitions. Cultural factors, such as gender, race, or ethnicity, constitute a crucial dimension for exploration.

Investigating how these factors intersect with military service and influence veterans' experiences and resilience levels can provide valuable insights.

Closely related is the investigation of coping strategies employed by post-9/11 Army veterans to navigate challenges and enhance resilience. This research aims to shed light on effective strategies, offering insights for developing resilience-building interventions. Moreover, exploring how personal growth and a sense of purpose contribute to veterans' resilience is a key area of study. This research examines the factors facilitating personal growth and how veterans derive meaning and motivation in their post-military lives.

Conclusion

The present research has illuminated the resilience and determination of post-9/11 Army veterans when confronted with challenges. Insights gleaned from the veterans' narratives underscore the integral role of military service, the significance of social support networks, the pursuit of personal growth, and the influence of motivation and purpose in shaping their resilience. These themes encapsulate the multifaceted factors contributing to their ability to surmount adversity.

A salient discovery from this study underscores the pivotal importance of supportive relationships within the military community and the veterans' familial and friendship circles. The bonds forged with fellow service members cultivate a sense of camaraderie, furnishing veterans with a robust support system that bolsters their resilience and empowers them to navigate adversities with fortitude. Additionally, the steadfast support from spouses and loved ones emerges as a cornerstone in the veterans' resilience, offering emotional stability and a profound sense of belonging.

The veterans' drive to continually enhance themselves and pursue personal growth is equally noteworthy. Their perception of life as an ongoing journey and embracing challenges as opportunities for learning and development underscores their cognitive flexibility and resilience in adapting to unpredictable circumstances. Moreover, the veterans' discovery of purpose and motivation through altruistic endeavors, whether in military service or civilian life, reflects a commitment to positively impact the lives of others. This dedication to a higher cause fortifies their resilience and reinforces their determination to surmount obstacles.

In conclusion, the findings of this research delineate a distinctive amalgamation of resilience, determination, and robust support systems characterizing post-9/11 Army veterans. Comprehending the intricacies of these contributing factors offers valuable insights for tailoring interventions and support mechanisms that prioritize the well-being of veterans and facilitate their successful transition into civilian life. Recognizing and nurturing these strengths is instrumental in bridging the cultural gap between military and civilian spheres, fostering a more supportive environment conducive to the flourishing of veterans.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

Research Title: Resiliency and Protective Factors Found within the Post-911 Military Cohort of Combat Veterans

Principal Investigator: David Smith

Faculty Supervisor: Nikki Johnson, PsyD.

Below explains what to expect in the present research study. Take the time necessary to review the details in this document. Be sure to understand the information before proceeding****

Participants: Post-9/11 veterans who have been on combat deployment, Age 18+

Purpose: This research is being conducted by David Smith, a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Northwest University, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The current research is being conducted as a fulfillment of the requirement for the Counseling Psychology Psy.D dissertation. The study will examine each military veteran participant's perception of resiliency development, maintenance, and application. Information gathered from participants includes demographic background, military enlistment/service details, resiliency, and protective factors.

Procedures: For this research, there will be demographic questions asked to gain introductory information for each participant regarding military service and mental health to ensure that inclusion criteria are met. Once completed, each of the eight participants will participate in an individual interview process. The interview process will be scheduled for 45-60 minutes. Participants will be sent a transcript of their interview so they can clarify or edit any information as they see fit.

Risk in Participation: There is a minimal likelihood that one may become uncomfortable in the interview process. This is to be expected and is a normal response when discussing sensitive and personal information, such as mental health, personal experiences, and thoughts and feelings. If there are any questions that elicit an emotional response that becomes uncomfortable, one may choose to not discuss the item or stop altogether at any point. All participants will be provided with a list of resources to address any issues or have discussions further with professionals at the conclusion of the survey. Participants will be provided with the Veterans Experience Office, VA Hotline number **1-855-948-2311**. This number is answered by a live agent 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. The website **psychologytoday.com/us?tr=Hdr_Brand** offers the ability to search for competent and licensed professionals in one's area.

Benefits to Participation: The information learned and gathered throughout the duration of this research project will provide vital insight and information about the strength and resilience of post-9/11 military veterans. Additionally, it will allow citizens and mental health professionals the opportunity to understand the veteran experience better. Even though there is no direct

benefit to the participant, the insight provided may help create future change and improved resources to become available for all veterans.

Compensation: Veteran volunteers that participate in this study will receive a $20 Amazon gift card as an expression of gratitude for their participation in the research and for trusting me with their valuable thoughts and feelings based on their real-life experiences.

Confidentiality: Participants' confidentiality is of utmost importance. The principal investigator and the faculty supervisor will be the only two individuals with access to the information gathered. All names will be deidentified to protect participants' identities. The information provided by participants will be securely kept. The audio and video recorded interview files will be stored on a password-protected USB hard drive and kept within a level 3 home security safe. All data containing identifiable information will be deleted after the completion of the purposed study.

Questions/Concerns: At any time if there are questions or concerns regarding participation in this research, or the rights of the participant in this research, you are welcome to contact the Principle Investigator, David Smith LMHCA SUDPT, at david.smith19@northwestu.edu or the Faculty Supervisor, Dr. Nikki Johnson, Ph.D. at nikkijohnson@northwestu.edu.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

CONSENT TO AUDIO & VIDEO RECORDING & TRANSCRIPTION

Resiliency and Protective Factors found within the Post 911 Military Cohort of Combat Veterans

David Smith, Northwest University

This study involves the audio or video recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio or audio recording or the transcript. Only the researcher and faculty supervisor will be able to listen (view) to the recordings.

The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the dissertation research has been concluded. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio or video tape me as part of this research. I also understand that this consent for recording is effective until the completion of this research study. At which points the recordings will be destroyed.

Participant's Signature: _____Date:_____

Appendix C: Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your ethnicity?

4. What is your current relationship status?

5. What is your highest level of education?

6. What branch of service were you enlisted in?

7. What were your Rank and MOS?

8. How many time were you deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan?

9. Do you experience mental health struggles (e.g., PTSD, Depression, Anxiety)?

10. Do you currently or have you ever sought help to address these concerns?

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of resiliency and how do you think people develop this quality?

2. What people come to mind when you think of resiliency?

3. What experiences did you have before military service that prepared you for enlistment and influenced your resilience, good or bad?

4. What experiences from your military career stand out above the rest where you were especially resilient?

5. Describe your experience of vulnerability during a time when you felt less resilient, how would you describe your experience?

6. During your transition back into the civilian world, what challenges did you face and how did you handle them?

7. What have you noticed among other soldiers and veterans who recovered the least or were hit the hardest?

8. How have you found a sense of community, or not, since leaving the military?

9. What protective factors are there in your life which help you cope and deal with life struggles?

10. How haves these protective factors changed or developed over your lifetime?

11. If you had the ability to make any changes to the military culture to foster more resilience into other soldiers or veterans, what would you change and why?

Appendix E: Recruitment Flyer