

EVALUATION OF A VETERANS TREATMENT COURT IN THE NORTHWEST

UNITED STATES

By

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis provides an evaluation of a Veterans Treatment Court in the northwestern United States. Previously collected data from clients within the court was analyzed and helped format semi-structured interviews with court employees. The conclusion of this evaluation is that the court would operate more effectively if there was a focus on the recruitment and retention of veteran employees, especially peer mentors. This could be accomplished by policy changes involving hiring new employees.

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INTRODUCTION

The military has always had a prominent place in my life. I spent eight years in the Montana Army National Guard; during that time, I participated in training exercises in multiple states and even other countries. I also worked with many military members from other nations. Going to basic training when I was 19 was a pivotal point in the development of the person I am now. More recently I have become focused on research that could help people who have also been in the military. That drive may have been there this entire time and I simply did not notice.

The goal of this thesis is to evaluate this veterans treatment court. It begins with a review of the existing literature on veteran treatment courts; defining what a veteran is; the challenges veterans can face; historic veterans' care; status courts and veteran treatment courts; and veteran treatment court studies.

This is followed by a section that covers the methodological approach used in this research. This involves identifying that it was a multimethod study that used existing focus group data and semi-structured interviews. Then how the data was analyzed and what themes were found within it. I conclude with a discussion about the results of this study and suggestions for the improvement of the program.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following literature review focuses on studies that explore the social support needs veterans face when they complete their military service, and the approaches taken by governmental and non-governmental organizations to provide services to this population. The first section describes the various definitions used by governmental institutions, the implications of these definitions for veterans who need support, specifically as it relates to Veteran Treatment Courts (VTC's). The second section outlines the scholarly research on the issues that veterans face once they exit their service in the military. This is followed by a discussion of the history of government programs for veterans with a focus on the use of status courts and veteran treatment courts. The closing section of the literature review summarized the existing program evaluation scholarship on mentor programs and the impact / effectiveness of veteran treatment courts.

Defining the Veteran Status

The term "veteran" can vary in scope depending on the study, program, department, and service member experiences. The United States Department of Veteran Affairs definition found within U.S. Code 38 states, "The term "veteran" means a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable" (United States Government Publishing Office 2022). What is interesting about this definition is that it does not include members of the National Guard or reserves unless those individuals were federally activated for reasons other than training, served at least 20 years, or were

disabled from an injury while in the line of duty. This “official” definition of what a ‘veteran’ is important, for a number of reasons that are germane to this thesis - Veteran status determines what benefits certain people can access. For example, most federal benefits such as The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) do not count a former National Guard or Reservist as a veteran. If they do not meet these criteria, they are sometimes still called veterans but do not have ‘veteran’ status. This is oftentimes confusing for former National Guard and reservists who are seeking veteran programs or services provided by the government and non-profit service organizations. This also complicates research and data collection efforts on veterans’ services, with researchers tasked with determining the classification of veterans’ eligibility for program services. One approach used to address this issue is the “benefits approach”, which simply classifies individuals as “veterans”, if they meet the criteria set by the service provider. For example, many “veteran” treatment courts, including the one in this study, accept reservists and National Guard members who do not meet the official federal government definition of “veteran”. In this case, VTC’s face economic challenges, as treatments prescribed might not be covered by Veteran Affairs (VA) benefit programs for those who do not fit the government classification. For this program evaluation, the VTC definition of veteran went beyond the federal government's narrow definition. This definition of veterans included: Anyone who had served in the United States Armed Forces and those who had a family member who had. In the case of the second group, they had to show how the United States military had affected their life in a way that they ended up in the criminal justice system.

The Challenges Veterans Can Face

United States military veterans have extremely specific experiences that are unique to them compared to the civilian population. This can include things like being in warzones, being away from family for extended periods of time, high risk training, and all of the stress that comes with those scenarios. Some of these situations are even designed to be stressful for service members as a part of their training. Between 2006 and 2021 32% of all active-duty service member deaths were from training accidents (Mann and Fischer 2021). They also have certain challenges that have emerged which may be related to these experiences. These include things such as suicide (Katz et al. 2012), health issues both physical and mental (De Luca et al. 2016), and becoming offenders within the criminal justice system (Lucas 2017). Being aware of these issues is important for any program that works with veterans. If program leaders and employees do not understand what veterans have experienced, how can they make informed decisions? This can become especially important when it comes to recognizing the warning signs associated with suicide.

Suicide.

Veteran suicide is a well-researched area of veteran issues. It is a troubling social problem that has been occurring within the United States at uniquely high rates. The Veterans Affairs National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report of 2019 indicated that 13.5% of the adult suicides in the United States were veterans even though they only make up 7.9% of the population (United States Department of Veterans Affairs 2020). One of the reasons that has been given for these high rates of suicide is the lack of

veterans utilizing the services provided the VA. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the part of the VA that is focused on healthcare. Certain aspects of this could be the physical accessibility to these services for veterans. Veterans living in urban areas are about 20% less likely to kill themselves than those living in rural areas (Mohatt et al. 2018). This may in part be related to how far away these services are from highly rural areas. The link between who is utilizing VHA care and suicide has been identified as a factor. Between 2000 and 2010 veterans made up around 25% of the United States suicides but only 5% were using VHA services (Hoffmire, Kemp, and Bossarte 2015). There are currently many different theories on why veteran suicide is so prevalent in the United States beyond what is discussed in this paragraph. Veteran suicide is an important problem that needs to be considered any program that works with veterans.

Mental and physical health.

Many veterans have disabilities that are directly related to their time in military service. This seems to be increased in individuals who have left military service in more recent years such as those who have fought in the second gulf war. Twenty six percent of all veterans have a service-connected disability, but 40% veterans from the second gulf war have them (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021). These service-connected disabilities could be both mental and physical as well. Physical injuries such as traumatic brain injuries, hearing loss, and lost limbs are a few examples of this. The largest mental health issue that is discussed in literature would be post-traumatic stress disorder. The commonality of mental health issues within veterans is so great that seeking help transcends civilian racial conceptions of mental health and sees much higher rates in

some minority groups compared to their civilian counterparts (De Luca et al. 2016). This could be due to increased access to mental health professionals.

Veterans and the criminal justice system.

Some veterans end up in the criminal justice system after leaving the United States Armed Forces. According to a 2021 report, almost eight percent of state prisoners and nearly six percent of federal prisoners were veterans (United States Sentencing Commission 2021). While veterans were less likely to be incarcerated than non-veterans, of the veterans who had been incarcerated 64% of them were serving sentences for violent offenses when compared to 48% of non-veterans. Out of all incarcerated veterans 75% had also not been deployed to a combat zone. That is to say that combat experiences are not the key factor in why these individuals ended up incarcerated. Slightly less than half of all incarcerated veterans reported being diagnosed with a mental health disorder (Bronson, Carson, and Margaret E. Noonan 2015). Suicide, health issues, and criminal justice are not the only negative factors impacting veterans, but they have a long history in the United States. This can be seen by all of the various veteran programs the United States has implemented throughout its lifespan.

Historic Overview of Veterans Care in the United States

Government programs for veterans started during the very beginnings of the United States in 1776 and expanded with every major conflict afterwards including: pensions for disabled soldiers after the Revolutionary War, veterans' homes that also gave medical care in the aftermath of the Civil War, post-World War I and the creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the creation of the GI Bill following World War

II (United States Department of Veterans Affairs 2022; Burtin 2020). The following examples are some of the actions the United States government has taken to help veterans.

The revolutionary war.

The newly formed United States of America was intent on gaining enough recruits to fight the British during the Revolutionary War. An article in the quarterly magazine published by the National Archives and Records Administration named Prologue discussed one of these. It was a law that was passed by congress called the First Pension Act and it was enacted on August 26th, 1776 (Nudd 2015; United States Department of Veterans Affairs 2022). This provided pensions to soldiers who had been disabled during the war and this theme would move forward in history.

The civil war.

After the Civil War there was a large number of injured veterans. This was in part due the fact that technology had surpassed war tactics. Mass formations of soldiers were a poor match for new technology such as rifled firearms, miniguns, and lever-action rifles. Due to the changing tactics and technology, legislation was put through congress and signed by President Lincoln in March 1865. This new legislation resulted in the creation of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Black soldiers who had been injured in the war were admitted into these facilities as well. These homes were used to take care of injured veterans and provide them with a place to live (National Park Service 2022; United States Department of Veterans Affairs 2022).

World war I.

The first World War was the first fully mechanized conflict that the United States became involved in. One of the major causes of concern were veterans who had been injured due to mustard gas exposure. These veterans required specialized care when they arrived home. On August 9th, 1921, the Veterans Bureau was created to oversee all of the veterans' programs that were in operation at that time. Later in 1928 these benefits even transferred to handle disabilities that were not service related. Finally, in 1928, women were allowed to use the National Veteran Homes (National Archives 2022; United States Department of Veterans Affairs 2022).

World war II.

Following the second World War there was a substantial increase in the number of veterans in the United States population. Leaders worried that the 16 million Americans who got home would be unemployed, and this could cause economic disaster for the United States right after a world war. The answer to this issue was a program that became known as the GI Bill. This was signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt on June 22nd, 1944. Within the first seven years of its existence around eight million veterans utilized the GI Bill. This program included more than just funding for education opportunities. The program also included home loans, and unemployment benefits. This has been a very transformative piece of legislation for the United States (United States Department of Defense 2019; United States Department of Veterans Affairs 2022).

Veteran treatment courts and the veteran justice outreach program.

As discussed, earlier homelessness among veterans has been an issue throughout the history of the United States. In response to rising cases of homelessness in justice-involved veterans the veteran justice outreach program was created by the Department of Veteran Affairs in 2009 (McGuire and Clark 2009). This came at a time when courts specialized for veterans were coming about in the United States. This may have been related to the rising popularity of VTC's in the United States. Regardless, the veteran justice outreach program has become embedded in many VTC's at this point.

Status Courts and Veteran Treatment Courts

A VTC is one type of status court that specializes in treating veterans who have committed substance abuse related crimes. A status court is a specialized court system focused on specific populations within the criminal justice system. The first of these status courts was a drug court that began in 1989 and soon after many other courts were created from this model (Collins 2017). These status courts offer a different approach than the traditional court system and have shown themselves to be an excellent alternative. Drug courts have been shown to be highly effective at reducing recidivism when compared to traditional court systems. One of these drug court systems managed to maintain a 16-17% recidivism rate when compared to the 70% country wide recidivism rate for untreated offenders (Torgensen et al. 2004). When the model adherence for drug courts was compared between adult and juvenile treatment courts it found that adult courts adhered more strictly to the model (Mei et al. 2019). However, drug courts were also shown to help reduce recidivism in juvenile offenders from 50% to 43.5% (Mitchell

et al. 2012). Due to the overall success of these courts the model was adopted for veteran offenders within the criminal justice system. VTC's became a part of these new status courts after the second gulf war. This could be due to the sudden influx of military veterans coming back from war zones in the 2000s. The first of these types of court began in 2008 in Buffalo, New York (Lucas 2017). In an attempt to maintain thoroughness, it should be known that other works have also referenced that a drug court in Anchorage, Alaska admitted veterans into their drug courts as part of a special program in 2004 (Easterly 2017; Hawkins 2010; Smith 2010; Garza 2014). Whether Anchorage or Buffalo is the first of these courts is inconsequential; they both started something that would become much larger. These types of courts take a different approach and are a transition from more punitive criminal justice models to a restorative model that focuses more on fixing the harm an offender caused. This is to say that this model of criminal justice includes things like victim-offender mediation, peacemaker circles, and community reparative boards (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 2012). These courts have been compared to the Restorative Justice model and while being less punitive than traditional courts were found to fall short of that ideal (Baldwin and Rukus 2015). Integrated care is a concept that could also fit within the Restorative Justice model, and it can be found in treatment courts and VTC's. They employ an integrated care approach that is needed and well suited to handling issues including: mental health, substance use, employment, and housing (Yerramsetti et al. 2017). Many VTC's such as the one that is the focus of this study have a program team

that includes representatives from treatment, law enforcement, and the court all working together. This makes communication between the different entities of the program easier.

These types of court systems have grown since their inception in the early 2000s. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) saw a 30% increase of courts that work with Veteran Justice Outreach Specialists (VJO) from 461 of these courts in 2016 to 601 at the end of 2020 (Stewart 2021). Many if not most of these courts do work with the VA through VJO's to help ascertain the veteran's treatment needs, provide updates to the court on that veteran if they consent, and connect that veteran with other VA treatment (2021). The increase in popularity of these court systems may be due to more pro-military member attitudes that are seen in the United States now. For example, popular attitudes in the Vietnam and post-Vietnam era were very anti-military. A professor of history at Arizona State University wrote an opinion article for The New York Times about Vietnam veterans and stated, "and it didn't take much for many Americans especially war protesters, to decide that the soldiers were themselves brutal and inhuman— leading to an ugly backlash in returning servicemen" (Longley, 2017). This contrasts with results from a Pew Research Center study on veterans that found 64% of non-veterans think that veterans are looked up to by the general public (Igielnik 2019). It may also be tied to the changing landscape of criminal justice reform. That being said there could also be some issue with the military's shift to all volunteers instead of relying in part on recruitment drafts, potentially resulting in people in adverse situations joining the military to escape them and eventually returning. These may also be the reasons for many of the issues currently affecting veterans in the United States.

Veteran Treatment Court Studies

Many distinct aspects of VTC's have been analyzed by researchers since their introduction in the early 2000s. These include recidivism research designed to determine the effectiveness of these courts. There has also been a focus on military culture and how it affects the veteran's interaction with non-veterans. How mentorship programs work and if they have a positive influence on VTC's. The veteran identity and how it impacts the decisions veterans make their feelings of how others treat them. While the specific research interests can vary greatly from one another, VTC's are found at their center.

Recidivism.

One of the ways used to determine the success of a program such as a VTC is recidivism. The United States Department of Justice definition "recidivism is measured by criminal acts that result in rearrest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the person's release" (National Institute of Justice 2022). These measurements are also used in assessing the effectiveness of veteran treatment courts such as one in Kentucky that showed a significant decrease in recidivism (Shannon et al. 2017). Rowen has called for future research that has for more analysis of individuals who did not go through the veteran court to see their success rate and compare it to those who did in order to assess how much of it is just from replacing the structure of the military with the structure of the court (2020). A study of this type specialized in trying to measure the rearrest difference in veterans who decided not to use a VTC compared to those who did was published a year before. Harley and Baldwin found that those who did go through the VTC had far

fewer rearrests. The ones who opted out had a rearrest rate of 28% and the veterans who completed the court had a rearrest rate of 12.5% (Hartley and Baldwin 2019). Similar positive effects of VTC recidivism rates have been found. One court found a one-year recidivism rate of 14% compared to a national 46% rate (Tsai et al. 2018). One study that compared regular probationers to probationers who were also in a substance abuse treatment program. Members of the treatment programs had lower rates of recidivism than those who were not (Hollis, Jennings, and Hankhouse 2019). Some scholars have pointed towards the possibility of a link with remaining a part of the community instead of going to prison. This phenomenon could be linked to Emile Durkheim's theory of social integration. If someone has been taken out of a community for years and introduced to a new community with different social rules such as prison. There could be significant adjustment issues when they have to come back to their original non-prison community. Justice involved veterans in some studies have indicated this as well 21% of those interviewed in once study referenced how the court had helped them reintegrate into the community (McCall et al. 2019). This can also be seen in studies that analyze recidivism differences in parolees and probationers. A parolee is someone who has spent a certain amount of time in prison then is released and under supervision. A probationer is someone who has been sentenced to supervision without going to a prison. One such study found that in a substance abuse treatment program parolees were more likely to recidivate than probationers within the first year (Evans et al. 2012). How well someone integrates back into society can also be seen in who graduates from these drug courts. Race, ethnicity, and gender had no significant impact on drug treatment graduation but

those who graduated were better educated, older, employed, had higher income, and more likely to have stable housing (Mikolajewski et al. 2021). If a criminal justice program does not attempt to address these varied factors their effectiveness will be limited. These programs may not even have to be heavily structured to be effective at reducing recidivism. In 2021 a study of two VTC's found no significant differences in recidivism rates even though one court had all offenders go to court and the other only had offenders go to court when they were not doing well in the program (Atkin-Plunk, Armstrong, and Dalbir 2021).

The Challenges of Military Culture and Importance of Mentor Programs

The mistrust of civilians.

Other studies involving VTC's have focused on what makes these types of courts different. One of the issues that has been discussed is various feelings of mistrust towards civilian employees of these courts by the veteran offenders. Ahlin and Douds (2016) found that trust was lacking veteran clients and non-veteran employees. Vaughan, Holleran, and Brooks (2019) examined how the military manifests itself within these courts. A finding of this study was that having veterans employed within the court may be beneficial for participants. Their study also noted that some military values may be having negative effects such as pride and this could create an issue where veterans do not want to ask for help. This can also be seen in the hyper-masculinity of military culture and how it can prevent people from seeking help for substance use disorders as well (Teeters et al. 2017).

The importance of mentorship programs.

The need for mentorship programs within these courts has been focused on by several scholars. The mentors in the programs have prior service in the United States military in every study that included that in the demographic information. These mentors are prior service military and seem to have an important impact on the success of veteran offenders (Jalain and Grossi 2020). This may be helping relieve possible feelings of mistrust towards civilian team members. The veterans gain a mentor that they can talk to who understands their military service. Frederick (2014) brings focus to how unique and important the mentor programs are in these courts. The common bond between mentor and mentee is not that of having the same problem but having the same common cause behind it (2014). This common cause being their time in service with their respective military branches. The importance of peer mentors was also indicated by offenders in 2013. When participants were asked about how important the mentorship program was 87% of them said it contributed to at least some of their program success (Slattery et al. 2019). The support provided by their mentors was also indicated to Herzog et al. When analyzing participant perceptions of VTC's they found that 61% of the offenders listed social support such as the mentor program as one of the main benefits of being in the VTC (2019). The mentor programs have shown to be a highly effective aspect of VTC's. Unfortunately, mentor retention and recruitment has been problematic for many of these VTC's. During the first national analysis of VTC's Baldwin noted that 51% of these courts reported challenges with maintaining their mentor programs and the most common issue stated was retention and recruitment (2012).

The veteran identity.

This commonality can be seen in another study that analyzed how the veteran identity plays a role in these courts. Ahlin and Douds (2020) found that many veteran offenders felt shame for being involved in the criminal justice system as a reflection on their branch of service. They also felt that law enforcement officers were harder on them than those who had not been in the military because they were not living up to a certain standard. This is most likely linked into military culture where sayings such as “I will not fail those with whom I serve. Will not bring shame upon myself or the Special Forces” are not uncommon (United States Army Special Operations Command 2022). This could be impacting how being a member of the military who ends up in the criminal justice system is perceived. The perceptions of what a VTC is could also be influential on if offenders want to be entered into this type of court.

*Stereotypes of VTC's – Perceptions of Veterans Treatment Courts**Perceptions of VTC's.*

The perception of VTC's is important to note and varies based on the position of those asked. Gallagher and Ashford (2021) focused on analyzing the differences in civilian and veterans on how legitimate VTC's were and their feelings on the criminal justice system. The veterans within the court felt that the court was legitimate. One other factor became apparent when the veteran surveys were compared to civilian surveys. Being Black had no effect on feelings towards the criminal justice system and being Hispanic actually showed more positive feelings towards the criminal justice system (Gallagher and Ashford 2021). When focusing on only the perceptions of civilians

Kieckhaefer and Luna (2020) gathered information about general feelings towards VTC's. Four-hundred and seventy-seven criminology college students were surveyed on the subject. Literature was found that these participants had more positive feelings towards veterans being admitted to these courts if the veterans were said to have PTSD. When they were told that the veteran just had a "war injury" they were much less supportive. This might be a general reaction based on the media attention PTSD within the veteran community has gotten. These perceptions may be playing on the idea that these veterans need help because of their military service and are easier to sympathize with.

Perception management.

Public perception is important in any program that relies on government funding. In the case of VTC's this may be a deciding factor in who they allow to become a client of the court. Douds et al. (2017). noted that the qualifications to be eligible for these courts vary, many courts do not accept veterans with an "other than honorable discharge" from the military. There also appears to be a substantial amount of these courts who will not accept veteran sex offenders. Which may in turn be an attempt to control how VTC's are perceived, carefully maintaining the image of the court by not accepting those who have committed crimes with stronger stigmas such as sex offenses.

Conclusion

This evaluation attempts to assess the effectiveness of a VTC in the Northwestern United States through secondary data analysis and semi-structured interviews. Evaluations are a crucial step in maintaining program effectiveness. The secondary data

that informs this evaluation was from focus groups conducted on justice-involved veterans at this VTC in the summer of 2021. It also includes semi-structured interviews with employees at this VTC in the fall of 2021. Field research that was gathered while working at this VTC as a Veteran Treatment Coordinator during the fall of 2021 was also included. Overall, the primary objective of this evaluation is to provide information to this VTC and others similar to it. This could be used to help keep policy makers and employees informed so they are able to create the most effective situation to benefit the justice-involved veterans within their courts.

METHODS

This thesis project used mixed methods to evaluate a VTC in the northwestern United States. From my eight years of experience in the Montana Army National Guard, I knew that I wanted to work with military veterans. I have had experience seeing the different struggles veterans face in my personal life. Multiple people I have served with ended up involved in the criminal justice system. Many of these, if not most, were due to the development of substance use problems. Driving while under the influence of alcohol convictions were not uncommon within the group of people I served with. The drinking culture within the military is the strongest one I have ever seen. I never saw anything that compares to it even though I have worked as a bartender and been to quite a few college parties. For example, it is common knowledge among military members that getting hooked up to an IV for fluids is the best way to cure a hangover. Unfortunately, a half a dozen soldiers I had served with have committed suicide. It has gotten to the point that my initial reaction to finding out about another service members death is to ask if it was a suicide. I have also heard this from multiple service members when I inform them about the death of someone we served with. These incidents have influenced my interest in the social problems that especially present in military communities. When I was getting my bachelor's, I double majored in Criminal Justice and Sociology. A result of this was an understanding and interest in where criminal justice and sociology intersect. The addition of veteran's issues happened in my first semester of college when I gave a presentation on veteran suicide. Many of my undergraduate projects and papers were about veteran

issues. This focus carried forward into graduate school and eventually the topic of my thesis.

As part of the requirements for Cal Poly Humboldt's Master's in Public Sociology, practicing track 240 hours of community placement is needed. I reached out to several veteran's organizations to arrange a placement, but nothing was quite the right fit. Much of this was due to the lack of internship opportunities from COVID-19 policies. I contacted the VTC in a nearby city in the spring of 2021 and worked with them over the summer to arrange placement. This court system was chosen in part due to its proximity to where I lived at the time and only required me to move over 120 miles away. I had already known about the court system from an internship I did during my undergrad with a Department of Corrections Probation and Parole office. Within my first week of employment with the court I worked with the judge to ascertain what work I could do that would be beneficial to the program and would fit within my degree requirements. We decided that some form of program evaluation would best serve the needs of the court and my program requirements.

Project Selection

My short-term contract with the court posed limitations for this program evaluation. The project had to meet the requirements for the degree but also fit within the 90-day window of my contract. This resulted in me working on the analysis and summarization of previously gathered client focus group data. The program leaders had set up these focus groups in the summer of 2021. The purpose of these focus groups was to assess the opinions of offenders when it came to the VTC program. The program

leaders wanted to access different areas of the program for overall program improvement. Prior to my work, the data from these focus groups had only been gathered and not analyzed.

After consultation with my advisor, and drawing from previous literature on program evaluations, I decided that I would use existing data as part of my study. Secondary data analysis can save money and time while increasing the depth of a study. Findings can also be interpreted in a new way that was not apparent or intended by the original author (Conerly, Holmes, and Tamang 2021). To supplement the already existing data on client perception and satisfaction, and get a more informed understanding of VTCs, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a small sample of employees who worked at that VTC. Interviews can help researchers by providing the freedom to ask additional questions for clarity, interesting subtopics, and possible additional questions (Conerly, Holmes, and Tamang 2021). Previous research and questions from the focus group helped influence the questions in my interviews. The individuals who were asked to be a part of the interview process were chosen to create a well-rounded group and special attention was paid to recruitment of individuals working in key positions. For example, previous research and the focus group data had questions involving mentor programs (Frederick 2014; Jalain and Grossi 2020; Herzog et al. 2019; Slattery et al. 2013). Because of the small number of employees at this VTC and the small amount of VTC's in the region identifying information has been removed from this research.

Program Evaluation

Evaluations are an important piece within the process of improving performance and provide evidence-based data that helps improve programs (Chyung 2015). There are several; methods used within program evaluations that include surveys, analysis of administrative data, key informant interviews, observation, and focus groups (Shackman 2008). This Evaluation applies two of these methods which are key informant interviews and focus groups. Program evaluations of VTC's have been conducted to measure the program effectiveness within these courts (Douds et al. 2017; Hartley and Baldwin 2019; Hollis, Jennings, and Hankhouse 2019; Jalain and Grossi 2020; Mitchell et al. 2012; Shannon et al. 2017; Slattery et al. 2013).

The Focus Group Archival Data

In the summer of 2021, program leaders of this VTC began the process of evaluating the program. They wanted the opinions of the justice-involved veterans in the program to help with this program evaluation. The program leaders recognized the importance of evaluating the program and had seen what other courts had done. This VTC has been operating since 2012 and has established itself as the front running VTC in the state. Because of this the program leaders are intent on making sure the program is implemented at peak efficiency. The current staff did not have experience in creating these evaluations and the additional work could have interfered with their normal workload. A third-party company was paid to develop the questions for focus groups. These focus groups were conducted in the summer of 2021 by individuals interning at the VTC. There was a total of 32 questions asked to each group. There were three client

focus groups in total; these included one group of seven women, a group of seven men, and an additional group of twelve men. The personnel facilitating these focus groups took notes and later inputted them into the survey monkey program. The focus group data had not been previously analyzed and was provided to me through online access to an online program called Survey Monkey. This work was limited without detailed notes gathered from focus groups. Much of this inputted data was limited to one or two sentences at most. The total amount of time each of these focus groups lasted is not specified in the data. This can make certain aspects of analysis more difficult. Ideally the data would have had more information about the groups reasons for what they said.

Interview Data

The interviews took place between September 2021 and December 2021. The study procedures were evaluated and approved by the ‘Institutional Review Board (IRB) (appendix A). This VTC has a small number of team members and thus no demographic information or identifying information was included to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Team members of this VTC were contacted by phone or in-person and were informed about the study and asked if they were interested in participating. If the individual agreed, they were emailed a copy of the informed consent form and asked to read it and indicate if they agree to it or not by replying to the email (appendix B.). If they agreed, interviews were scheduled in time periods that worked well for them. They were interviewed over a video messaging application or over the phone. These interviews were conducted synchronously to help mirror more traditional interviews (James &

Busher, 2012). The interviews were semi-structured in nature to keep a general theme within this research (appendix C). The questions were focused on understanding the effectiveness of the overall program and various aspects within it. Semi-structured interviews have been used previously to learn information from VTC employees (Ahlin and Douds 2016; Herzog et al. 2019). This also allowed the interviewer to have the flexibility to have participants expand on their answers. The final two questions involved asking participants what questions they thought should be asked. I asked participants if they thought I was missing anything important in the interviews and if they had anything else they wanted to talk about that I had not asked. This was done to enrich future interviews by adding those questions to the other questions. It was also done to try and help nullify the power dynamic of interviews. I wanted to try and ensure individuals that I was not there to evaluate them as employees for their supervisors. Demonstrations of the power dynamics of interviews are heavily embedded within their produced data (Briggs, 2002). These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with Otter.AI. Post-interview these transcriptions were edited to ensure accuracy and within 30 days of the interview the audio files were transcribed and deleted.

The majority of participants within these interviews seemed happy to participate in this study. Only one interviewee seemed nervous about saying anything negative involving the program. At one point during the interview, I stopped and reminded the person that they did not have to answer anything that they did not wish to, and they could stop the interview at any time. This person chose to continue the interview after further confirmation indicating that what they said would not be linked to them. The other people

interviewed seemed excited to talk about the program and their experiences working there. After the interviews many of them kept discussing the topic after the recording stopped. These discussions involved workshopping solutions, my opinions on different aspects of the program, and what the current literature on the topic indicated.

Focus Group Methods

The first set of questions were used to gain some demographic information about the participants beyond how they were grouped together originally. The original groupings separated the participants by gender. This information could be useful in measuring the feelings of people who had been in the program longer or were in a higher phase than those who were not. This was followed by questions about the positive and negative aspects of the court. The next section of questions involved how they felt they were treated by different staff members and if they felt the staff understood their military service. These types of questions have been used in previous studies to attempt to understand how it impacts levels of trust between staff and clients (Ahlin and Douds, 2016). The subsequent section was focused on the treatment aspect of the program. These questions were not limited to substance abuse treatment but also included mental health treatment. This court, like many VTC's, uses a mentorship program and included a question about it. The importance of peer mentor and client relationships has previously been researched (Jalain and Grossi 2020). The last section of these focus group questions included questions about what the respondents would change about the program if they could, what was the most challenging part of the program, and how COVID-19 impacted the program. Upon having access to all of the data I analyzed it and began to separate out

the various themes found within. I was somewhat limited in the format I did this as the judge in charge of the court indicated the format they wished to get the information. This included separation of topics into sections such as what was working and what was not working in the program.

Interview Guide Overview

My main goal with these interviews was to find common themes that became apparent within these interviews. My questions were based heavily on the information I learned from previous literature and the focus group data. I wanted to build off of what the focus data had shown and further improve my understanding by asking questions that it could not answer. Overall, this included the opinions of the staff members within the program. One aspect of these interviews is that almost every interview had more questions than the interview prior to it because I asked these respondents what questions they thought I should be asking. Additionally, many of these people had been working in this court for years and had much more experience than I did with several aspects of the program.

The first questions were focused on having the participant explain the program to me along with the program's mission and goals. This was followed by asking them questions about themselves such as how they became involved with the program and if they had family who were military members. The next section of questions was centered around how efficient they believed the program was. This included questions about what the program did well and what challenges it faced. The subsequent questions were centered around improving the program. These questions consisted of possible

improvements, what they thought were important skills to have in their position, what skills they had or wished to have, and what resources could help improve the program. Interview questions were also asked about factors outside of the direct control of the program. These included questions ranged from such as if they thought there was something the community could do to help veterans before they became involved in the criminal justice system and if there were enough volunteer opportunities for veterans in the program. The final set of questions were designed to help me improve my future interviews. These consisted of questions about if they had something to share that we did not already discuss or if they thought I was missing something in my interviews that could be important.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study analyzed data from two separate samples, the client focus groups and the interviews with employees. The focus group involved the opinions of justice-involved veterans within the program and the interviews to gauge program opinions of employees in the program. First, I will report the information from the focus groups interviews with clients of the VTC. These themes can help bring forward important aspects of this program from an employee perspective. Next, I will report the findings gathered from the semi-structured interviews and discuss common themes that emerged from interviews with staff.

Focus Groups

The focus group participants were all clients of the VTC and included three groups. Group 1 (G1) contained seven males, group 2 (G2) twelve males, and group 3 (G3) contained seven female participants.

Several themes emerged from the focus group data. The way these themes were analyzed reflected what the VTC program leaders were interested in discovering from these focus groups. The data was separated into what they liked most, what they liked least, the most common positive themes found, the most common negative themes found, and the most common suggestions.

What they viewed most positively about the program.

Some common concepts that came up when the participants were asked about what they liked most about the program were accountability, the fact they were not in jail, and that the judge understands the importance of family. The accountability of the

program is reflective of how it is structured. The clients are all veterans and were used to the rigid structure of the military. This structure holds them accountable for their actions differently than a traditional court. Many of these clients would be in jail, prison, or an inpatient treatment program if they were not in this program. This program allows them to stay within their communities while working through the program. The judge allows family members to come to court and other program activities. Some of these activities include activities that are family friendly so that they can be included in their family member's treatment process. If they were incarcerated this would not be an option.

The most common positive themes found.

The majority of participants felt that they were being treated fairly by the judge and law enforcement within the program. This is a key factor especially when it comes to how the clients feel about the judge. Within the program the judge is the figurehead, and they make the final decision in most cases. Thus, if clients do not trust that the judge is fair, they may not want to be in the program regardless of the benefits it provides. Clients also reported that the counselors and mentors were incredibly supportive and specifically brought up how much they appreciated having the mentors. It should be noted that all of the mentors within this program had served in the military during their life as it provides more common ground between them and clients. This VTC provides classes that are designed to teach new hobbies to the clients including activities such as yoga, art classes, horseback riding, and mixed-martial art style workout classes. The latter of these was called FIGHT and was very popular among the clients. This may be due to the activity being seen as a more masculine option that reflects the culture of the military.

Understanding which of these programs are popular can help make sure they are continued.

What they viewed most negatively about the program.

During these focus groups the participants listed were asked where the program needed to be improved. These things included: the lack of communication, the clients feeling as if they are trying harder than the program employees, and various issues around drug testing. The lack of communication was not entirely focused on the lack of communication between the client and employees but also the lack of communication between employees in different departments of the program. The feelings that they are trying harder than the program employees might stem from this general lack of communication. These feelings were focused on how they believe that they are trying harder to make the program successful than the employees were. Lastly, issues around drug testing included long waits at the location where they are tested. It also included how the court treats a dilute (a result from a urinalysis that indicates someone was drinking copious quantities of water to flush their system) as a failed drug test.

The most common negative themes found.

The client focus groups reported that there was an overall lack of communication within the program. This was especially apparent when it came to contacting the probation officer and veteran coordinator. In the case of the probation officer two of the groups indicated that they thought the officer had too large of a caseload. They felt as if they were not able to receive adequate communication because of this. The groups also indicated that the prosecutor was “cold” or “brutal”. This may be an indication of that

individual's personality or the fact that they are there to represent the interests of the state. The answers given again confirmed what previous research had identified when it came to military culture. The clients reported that the mental health services seemed adequate, but the counselors may lack understanding of military service. This was not limited to the counselors, clients reported that the majority of staff did not understand the experiences of military service. Unlike the mentors who are all veterans the most of the staff were not. These feelings of being misunderstood are reflective of the existing literature on the topic of mentor programs and military culture within VTC's (Ahlin and Douds, 2016). When questions about treatment were asked of the groups, they stated that they wished the Aftercare/Relapse Prevention program was tailored better to individual experiences. None of the focus groups knew if their VA benefits were being coordinated with the VTC when it came to treatment expenses. Of the classes provided to the clients the one that was disliked the most was the YOGA class. Understanding this could help allocate time and resources to other classes. All of these classes were interrupted during COVID-19 and an unknown number of the participants had never experienced them.

The most common recommendations.

Some common recommendations on what could improve the program were asked to the different client groups. These groups indicated that they did not have strong feelings about the different incentives that the court offers. These incentives included gift cards, clothing, and other small prizes. For example, a baseball cap with the court logo or a Starbucks gift card. If the incentives had bigger prizes or if they got you tickets for a large prize at the end of the month it would be more exciting. Since many of the

incentives are purchased products, this feedback is important for resource management. All groups indicated that a gym membership would be a great incentive offered by the court. This type of activity could also be an effective activity to help occupy the clients in the same way that other classes focused on teaching hobbies do.

Gender bias within focus groups.

Gender did end up playing a role in how the respondents answered the questions. On nearly every occasion that only two out of the three groups agreed on something, it was the two male groups versus the female group. This became most apparent when groups were asked about individuals within certain positions of the court program who are female. An example of this would be how they felt about the prosecutor who worked within the VTC. In most cases where the employee was female, the male groups disliked them while the female groups did not. Whether this gender bias has to do with female employees in positions of authority or another significant factor is not known.

Interviews

In contrast to the pre-existing data, interviews were conducted with the employees of the VTC. This was done to create a more robust understanding of This VTC. The qualitative data from these meetings was coded using ATLAS.ti to help identify commonalities between interviews. One approach that has been previously used in evaluative analyses of VTC's is a six-step model (Shannon et al. 2017). This involves organizing and coding data, developing themes from the data, coding the data, reviewing coding to create themes for data analysis, picking out quotations to help describe the

themes, interpretation of what was found. The current evaluation follows this model to help create a solid foundation from which to build.

Participants.

The interview study participants were a purposive sample of five employees who worked within this VTC program and were willing to be interviewed. The VTC in this case had between 10 to 15 employees working with the court specifically. This VTC also works with several other organizations who all have their own employees such as private treatment facilities. Among the participants in this sample 1 worked with treatment, 1 worked as court staff, 2 were mentors.

Interview Themes

Two main themes came to the fore when conducting qualitative data analysis. The first of these was wanting to help veterans and the second was concern for program effectiveness. The first of these themes contains codes involving supporting veterans in and out of court and close veteran association. The codes within the second theme are criminal justice reform, understanding veteran service, and capacity of the court.

Wanting to Help Veterans

One of the two current main themes that have appeared is that employees indicate that they want to help veterans. That is to say that they consider what they accomplish is more important than what they gain financially. Many of the people who work within this program are unpaid volunteers. Under this theme, there are three main codes that reflect this including supporting veterans within the court, supporting veterans outside of the court, and close veteran association.

Supporting veterans within court.

All of the employees indicated their concern with programs within the court and how to make them function better.

John, whose demographic information has been removed, stated the reason he was in the court was, "I will celebrate my 37th year of sobriety. That is one reason why I volunteered for the mentor program is because of my experience and in the substance abuse. I just felt like I would be able to help my fellow veterans with that and relate to them and gain their confidence and be able to help them". John expresses immense pride in being a mentor in the court for other veterans. All his mentees have been quite a bit younger than him, and he expresses fatherly concern about them. He takes his job of helping these veterans in the court very seriously.

Dan, a veteran with 35 years of military experience, explained how veterans are helped within the court, "They get themselves in trouble, in a large part by self-medicating because of experiences and events that have transpired in the military. I think that once you have crossed that line and into trouble with the civilian authorities, the vets court injects some of that structure back into their lives. It's got some pretty regimented demands, and I think... I think the veterans are comfortable with that type of lifestyle. It kind of helps them ease the transition between the regimented routine of the military and then easing back into civilian life",

Kim, who works within the treatment sphere of the program discussed this topic as well, "yeah, there's so much opportunity there, but I just don't know how do we, how do we help clients see that this is a help, not a hindrance. It's not a handout, it's a hand up.

That's always my big thing and then how do we help them? Help them to give back to the community in a way that's going to be good for them, right, to feel connected?"

Supporting veterans outside of court.

Another theme that emerged within my interviews was the concern that employees had with programs in the community that could help potential clients. All of the employees expressed how the veterans need support outside of the current bounds of the program. This ranged from the general community to actions they themselves were taking.

Kim indicated her concern about this during the interview, "I think connection is the biggest thing it's.... the opposite of addiction is connection and do we form enough connection for them to be successful outside of this (the VTC program)". Kim discussed this type of thing more than once during the interview and after the interview asked if I could give her a list of veteran programs outside of the court.

John discussed how the connections he has made within the court have continued with clients outside of the court, "you know, I just talked to a gentleman that graduated in the last class this morning and he's got his sentence hearing coming up this week. And so, I'm going to go to the hearing with him and you know, we (he and the clients) stay in contact for a year, two, or three years, we become good friends." Throughout the interview John expressed how much he cares about veterans who are struggling.

Close veteran association.

Many of the participants have close ties to veterans which include family members.

Anne, who works with clients on using technology to connect with counselors and the court, indicated many of her family members are veterans, “my dad is a veteran of the Army. He served seven years, honorable discharge. My great aunt served about 21 years in the Army, and she met my great uncle in South Korea because he was in the Air Force for 22 years.” Anne talked about her family members' service in a very respectful way, and it was a manner of pride for her.

Kim also has close ties to veterans in her personal life, “I also am married to a veteran. So that's important for me, that veterans have a second chance, veterans have the help that they need”.

Program Effectiveness

The second main theme that shows up is their concern for program effectiveness. This includes three main codes: criminal justice reform, understanding veteran service, and the capacity of the court.

Criminal justice reform.

All the employees indicated that veterans were exposed to particular things and that their crimes might not be entirely their fault. In a traditional criminal justice system, the blame is firmly placed upon the perpetrator of the crime and this deviation away from that could be seen as reform.

Kim, discussed a type of justice reform in training front line workers, “Maybe having more language for those who may be the frontline workers like the police officers. I see them forming that bond and that trust and saying we're here, we're hoping, we don't, we don't want you to suffer anymore. We don't want you to fall further. I don't

know how to make it better. I think it's... I think a barrier for each person is different. So, it depends on the person. So, I would say I think our society needs a little different assessment of identifying those prior to them becoming a problem.” Kim works with people struggling with addiction for a living and before that worked with incarcerated mental health patients. One of her biggest focuses is trying to get people to understand what these people go through.

Dan, indicated how veterans react to certain situations and why VTC’s are important, “I would say that a lot of veterans get in trouble. Probably because they are veterans and their response to certain circumstances and situations is probably a little different than somehow that's not a veteran. Sometimes that has to do specifically with what they were trained to do in the military and the response that they had, that they would, would be perfectly acceptable in the military might not be so acceptable in the civilian world”.

Understanding veteran service.

All the employees indicated that the ability to understand what military service is like is important to this program.

Dan explained it this way when asked, “they don’t know. They don’t know what a civilian has to go through to become a soldier, a sailor, an airmen, a marine, and then when that goal is achieved, they don’t know what those service members go through during their tenure of service. I think they... I think they’ve got hearts of pure gold, but they don’t have the deep-down understanding. You know, they can read books and whatnot, but they haven't walked the walk.” This was one of the clearest explanations of

the importance of understanding veteran service that any participant was able to express. The court does have literature it gives to its employees to try and explain some cultural differences in the military.

Anne also spoke about this during the interview with her, “there’s like a mentor program for people who've been through this within (the court). So, they can relate on another level by being veterans because that's something mentally, that I will not understand because I've never been a veteran. I've never served this country and so I think that the focus on community in the treatment is what I love”.

Capacity of the court.

All the employees made indications that increasing the size of the VTC needs to be a major priority to help as many veterans as possible.

Anne, indicated this issue when being asked about the challenges the program currently faces, “I think the biggest issue too is like the high demand for people wanting to be in but not having enough capacity for it.” This quote like many of the other statements from participants indicated worry about the program not being able to help as many veterans as they would like.

Kim also spoke on this during the interview, “we haven't had as many screenings or inductees as like the, you know, in comparison to even the (dui court) program. So, providing that opportunity for those who may not know that this is available for them”.

DISCUSSION

Ethics

The VTC has an extremely limited number of team members, and it would be easy to identify people even with simple demographic information. This information was not included in the study to protect the participants from any possible identification. Ethical considerations for the confidentiality of participants were considered throughout the interviews even after these forms were signed (Heggen and Guillemin, 2012). Unchanged information was stored on a password protected google share drive with the intent to be deleted after one year. The informed consent forms were done over email. The researcher worked with these individuals and there is a possibility that this situation could have affected their answers. The region where this study was conducted does not have a large amount of VTC's and because of this identifying information about the VTC has been removed. Likewise, the VTC in this study does not have a large number of employees and their identifying information has been removed from this research as well.

Limitations

This study was conducted in one VTC in the northwestern United States and is limited due to that. Attempting to generalize the findings of this research to apply them to other VTC's should be done cautiously. The focus group information that was used was not gathered by this researcher and the exact methods for how it was conducted are not known. Direct quotes were not included in the data from the focus groups and thus could not be used in my analysis. The timeframe that I was able to conduct interviews in was limited to a few months and it is unclear what themes would have emerged if the study

had been longer. I was unable to observe all of the interactions between clients and employees. This includes scenarios such as group therapy and other activities. While doing this research I was also working between 30 to 40 hours a week at the VTC in question. It is possible I missed key components by being involved in the court system. The employees I interviewed know that I was doing evaluatory work for the program leaders. This in turn may have caused them to be worried that I was evaluating their job positions. This could have influenced the answers they gave me. It should also be noted that I served in the military for eight years. This may have caused a certain amount of bias in this study.

Future research

In the futural the inclusion of long-term qualitative data could be used to better understand the general opinions of state VTC employees and clients. Participant observation could also be an effective means in evaluating VTC's such as this one. The themes found in this could be used as a basis for questioning in future research. Comparative research with this VTC and other VTC's that fit within similar demographic areas could be done to better gauge program proficiency.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of this VTC mirrored concepts found within the existing literature quite well. Military culture and the ability for civilians to understand what military service is like and how it changes people is seen throughout the study. Feelings of distrust by veteran clients towards civilian employees reflects what has been previously found in (Ahlin and Douds 2016; Vaughan, Bell Holleran, and Brooks 2019). This was also reflected in some of the comments made by employees who work within this VTC. The biggest commonality between all of the employees who were interviewed was their drive to help veterans. All of them either had veteran family members or were veterans themselves. Based on the answers given in the focus group, I am not sure that the clients of the court necessarily believe that all of the employees have their best interest at heart.

Recommendations

The suggestions for program improvement based on this evaluation include: increased veteran hiring, increased recruitment or mentors, an overhaul of communication practices, providing a gym membership as a benefit to clients, and improving the client's knowledge of where to get additional help if they need it.

If this VTC could manage to get more veterans into various positions amongst the team it may help improve a lot of the mistrust and feelings of misunderstanding.

Vaughan, Holleran, and Brookes (2019) also suggested this would be beneficial to court clients in their study. realize this is an arduous task as many of the positions are not controlled by the court system in itself. For example, the judge has no control over who the Department of Corrections Probation and Parole office hires. They could however indicate that a veteran in the position that works with this VTC would be preferable.

Increasing recruitment and retention of mentors within the program is a crucial aspect to the success of this program. Jalain and Grossi (2020) indicated that these veteran peer mentors may be serious impacts on veteran offender success. This can be seen again in Slattery et al. (2013) where 87% of veteran offenders said that the mentors contributed to at least some of why they were successful in the program. Figuring out a way to increase the number of mentors should be high on the list of goals for the program. I would suggest trying to reach out to the Veterans of Foreign Wars or American Legion for potential recruits. These positions are a considerable time commitment, and a volunteer position means that success might be limited.

All of the clients felt that lack of communication was a huge issue within the program. This was not just referring to their ability to communicate with different program members but the lack of communication between program members. Attempting to make improvements to the way communication works within the program will be beneficial.

Providing a gym membership to clients would be a positive improvement for them. One of the ideas behind getting them into hobbies is to create positive replacements for substance use. Working out might be an ideal hobby for this as it helps with physical health. While I was working at this VTC I had begun communication with a gym that only allowed former military service members to have gym memberships. The gym was more than happy to provide free memberships to the clients of the VTC. Unfortunately, my time with the VTC ended before I could finish this work. Most of the work I had yet to complete was passed on to the veteran coordinator.

The VTC does not provide benefits for every situation their clients face, and this would be frankly impossible. However, if the VTC was able to point clients in the right direction by providing them with contact information to non-profits and other organizations that help veterans it would be beneficial. This type of integrated care approach used by VTC's has been indicated by Yerramsetti et al. (2017) as well suited to handle issues the clients might face. This was already happening on a small scale while I was with this VTC. I had begun to create a list of every organization that could be helpful to the clients. My idea behind this was to make "cheat sheets" for people in the coordinator positions. For example, if someone was having financial trouble there would

be a list of possible organizations that could help them. Another alternative would be to direct the clients to an organization that helps veterans by networking with other organizations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

Date: 11/2/2021

To: Anthony V Silvaggio

Jacob Davis Stalcup

From: Susan Brater

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

IRB #: IRB 21-049

Subject: Evaluation of a Veterans Substance Abuse Court in the Northwest United States

Thank you for submitting your application to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. After reviewing your proposal, I have determined that your research can be categorized as Exempt by Federal Regulation 45 CFR 46.104(d) because of the following:

Your research will only include interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information is recorded in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained; (ii) Disclosure of the subjects' responses outside the research would not place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded in such a

manner that the identity of the subjects can be ascertained, and the IRB conducts a limited review.

The anniversary date of this proposal is. By HSU policy, all data collection related to this 11/2/2022

protocol must stop on the anniversary date, unless a renewal/annual report is submitted.

In order to prevent any interruption in your research, please submit a renewal/annual report in time for the IRB to process, review, and extend the Exempt designation (at least one month).

Important Notes:

- Any alterations to your research plan must be reviewed and designated as Exempt by the IRB prior to implementation.
 - Change to survey questions
 - Number of subjects
 - Location of data collection,
 - Any other pertinent information
- If Exempt designation is not extended prior to the anniversary date, investigators must stop all data collection related to this proposal.
- Any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately to the IRB (irb@humboldt.edu).

cc: Faculty Adviser (if applicable)

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

Effectiveness of Veteran Substance Abuse Courts

Introduction

This interview is part of a master's thesis research project for Jacob Stalcup, graduate student in Sociology at Humboldt State University. It will be exploring and evaluating the effectiveness of veteran substance abuse courts in the northwestern United States.

Procedures

You will be interviewed via Zoom or similar video conferencing software for less than an hour about your opinions of the veteran substance abuse program. The interview will be digitally recorded using a cellphone or laptop and will be password protected. Within two days of the interview, these audio files will be moved to a Google share drive and removed from the recording device. Within one month of the interview, the audio file will be transcribed and deleted. The transcription may be stored for up to 7 years after the interview.

Confidentiality

Information given during this interview will remain confidential. This will be done by changing names and disguising any details of interviews that may reveal the identity of the interviewee or people they talk about. Any quotes from you will be selected to make identification difficult. The unchanged information will be stored on a Google share drive. This unchanged information will be destroyed one year following the completion of this study. The consent forms with your signature will be scanned and then stored on a

password protected computer separately from your interview transcript. They will be maintained for 3 years after the study is complete. The Institutional Review Board will have the right to inspect these records only for reasons of maintaining research integrity.

Whom to Contact for Questions

Jacob Stalcup can be contacted at (406) 853-1796, jds214@humboldt.edu. Anthony Silvaggio, Graduate Coordinator, Department of Sociology Chair, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Humboldt State University, who will be supervising this study, can be contacted at anthony.silvaggio@humboldt.edu. This study has been approved by the Humboldt State University Institutional Review Board, who can be contacted at (707) 826-5165 or at irb@humboldt.edu.

Study Specifics

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of veteran substance abuse courts in the northwestern United States.

Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks for participants: risks are no greater than the discomfort you may experience in everyday professional interactions. This research may possibly help others in the future. This research is part of an evaluation and may help improve the program. The experience may also be beneficial if you enjoy talking about your job and what you do to help.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION/FREEDOM FROM
COERCION/FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW**

If you do not want to answer a question or wish to stop the interview at any time, you can without any consequences of any kind.

If you have questions, please ask the interviewer before replying to this email affirming that you consent to participate.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Interview guide

These are examples of the types of questions that will be asked while these interviews are being conducted.

Veteran Substance Abuse Court

Confirm their consent from email. Bring up how this is recorded (State Law).

Tell me a little about yourself? (Background, education, where you work, where you want to work).

How would you describe this program to someone? (Goals, mission etc.).

How did you get involved with this program? (Networking, help for future plans, family who are veterans).

What do you think this program does the best?

How has your experience in this program been? (Time working here, general experiences, anything that has stood out).

What challenges do you think this program faces currently?

What do you think would improve the program? / overcome the challenges?

(You might want to ask about training. A question that asks them about the skills they have or would like to have?)

What skills do you think are important for folks to have in this position? (What sorts of training do you think would be essential for someone in this job?)

(Question on resources - What are the current resources needed to run the program / your job? What resources might help improve the program / job/ effectiveness?) (multi-agency cooperation/effectiveness)

Is there something missing in the community that could help veterans before they become involved in the criminal justice system?

Do you think that there are enough volunteer opportunities for veterans in the program or do you have any suggestions for other types of volunteer projects?

Is there anything that we did not talk about that you would like to share?

Do you think I am not asking a question I should be or missing something important during my interviews?