

2021

Florida's Veteran Treatment Courts

John Rocco Capra
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

John R. Capra

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. James Herndon, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Jana Price-Sharps, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Jerrod Brown, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Florida's Veteran Treatment Courts

by

John R. Capra

MA, Walden University, 2019

BS, Florida State University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

August 2021

Abstract

Following the terror attacks on the United States, an increasing number of veterans are returning to civilian life after having experienced service in active combat zones. As a result, many of these veterans are returning from their military service suffering from serious mental health issues and other injuries that include posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and major depression. Since the early 1990s, several specialized therapeutic courts have been developed as part of an effort to address a specific population within the state criminal justice systems. One of these recent court systems is the Veterans Treatment Court (VTC), created first in Buffalo, NY, to mitigate criminal sentences by considering the experiences the defendant brought to the court that were influenced by the effects of military service. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach and employed a descriptive survey to collect the underlying data. The data collected support a positive response to the research question that the creation of a specific veterans' culture is a motivating factor in an individual successfully completing a VTC program in the state of Florida. This research may influence positive social change through identifying that such treatment support given through a Florida VTC program is provided in a unique environment tailored to the cultural understanding of the veterans and is aimed at a specialized population, the military veteran. The findings of this study provide a greater understanding of how and why Florida VTC programs are implemented, and this knowledge can be disseminated and replicated for future use in other VTCs to minimize recidivism among this target population and reduce incarceration costs for the various state and local criminal justice systems.

Florida's Veteran Treatment Courts

by

John R. Capra

MA, Walden University, 2019

BS, Florida State University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

August 2021

Dedication

For my wife.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. James S. Herndon and Dr. Jana L. Price-Sharps for their invaluable guidance and advice.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Theoretical and/or Conceptual Framework for the Study.....	8
Nature of the Study.....	9
Assumptions.....	9
Scope and Delimitations	10
Limitations	11
Significance.....	12
Summary.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	14
Literature Search Strategy.....	16
Theoretical/Conceptual Foundation.....	17
Problem Solving/Specialty Courts.....	17
Drug Courts.....	19
Mental Health Courts.....	21
Veteran’s Treatment Courts.....	23

Specific Veteran Issues	28
Veteran’s Mental Health.....	29
Conclusion	30
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	31
Research Design and Rationale	32
Role of the Researcher	34
Methodology	36
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	37
Summary	39
Chapter 4: Results	41
Setting	42
Demographics	43
Data Collection	47
Data Analysis	49
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	57
Results.....	59
Summary	69
Chapter 5: Implications/Conclusions/Discussion	71
Interpretation of Findings	72
Limitations of the Study.....	74
Recommendations.....	76
Implications.....	78

Conclusions.....	79
References.....	81
Appendix: Survey Instrument of Selected Florida VTCs	93

List of Tables

Table 1. Respondent Courts Characteristics	43
Table 2. Eligibility Exclusions.....	44
Table 3. Veteran Demographics	46
Table 4. Theory Driven Deductive Code of Veterans Culture, Descriptions, Examples, and Themes	53
Table 5. Deductive Code Support of the Theme that the Creation of a Veterans' Culture within a VTC is a Major Component of What Court Administrators' Believed Made the Program Successful.....	54
Table 6. Reward/Sanction Ladder or System of Treatment Phases VTC Uses	56
Table 7. Treatments and Services Available.....	61
Table 8. VTC Objectives (Other Than Treatment).....	62
Table 9. VTC Formal Supervision Process.....	63
Table 10. Initial Screening Areas Explored.....	65
Table 11. Participation Requirements.....	66
Table 12. Graduation Requirements	67
Table 13. VTC Administrators Opinions on Outcomes.....	69

List of Figures

Figure 1. Copy of F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program (2021).....	3
Figure 2. Map of Active VTCs in Florida.....	4

Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study

Since the Global War on Terror was initiated, following the attacks on the U.S. homeland in September 2001, numerous veterans who experienced combat and saw service in forward areas, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, are returning to civilian society. Unsurprisingly, many veterans are returning to civilian life facing major depression, substance abuse problems, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other serious mental health issues (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Russell, 2015). Since the early 1990s, several specialized “therapeutic courts” have been developed as part of an effort to address specific populations within the state criminal justice systems (Melton et al., 2007, p. 39). One of these recent court systems is the Veteran Treatment Courts (VTC), first created in Buffalo, NY, to mitigate criminal sentences by considering the experiences the defendant brought to the court that were influenced by the effects of military service (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Lennon, 2019).

Currently, there are over 500 such VTCs in 43 states (Baldwin & Brooke, 2019; Johnson et al., 2015; Rowen, 2020). It is believed that the effectiveness of such a specialized court is based, in part, on addressing the underlining behavioral causes that led to criminal charges and its intersection with the shared experiences of a “veteran culture” (Ahlin & Douds, 2016, p. 93; Frederick, 2014). Although VTCs have been growing in establishment, little research has specifically centered on their outcomes and implementations (Shannon et al., 2017). This study helps fill the gap in understanding how Florida’s VTCs are implemented and the outcomes recorded for military service and involvement within the criminal justice system. In this study, I focused exclusively on the

existing VTC programs in the state of Florida, which currently has the third-largest population of veterans within its state (Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, 2020).

Background

To understand VTCs in Florida as an overall topic, it's helpful to know how existing VTCs in Florida are created under existing Florida law, how they operate, and which court jurisdiction they function under (i.e., the county court or circuit court). There are 67 counties in the state of Florida, and the state's various VTCs range from being created at all levels of court jurisdiction and being created and administered in both county and circuit court. The only controlling law in Florida is under F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program (2021), which states that the chief judge of each of the 20 judicial circuits within the state may establish a VTC within that circuit under certain conditions (see Figure 1). These conditions include acceptance of veterans and servicemembers based on, among other things, their military service, criminal history, substance abuse, mental health treatment needs, defendant veteran's agreement to complete the program, and the recommendation of the state attorney and the victim, if any (Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program, F.S. §394.4789, 2021).

Figure 1

Copy of F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program (2021).

The 2020 Florida Statutes

Title XXIX
PUBLIC HEALTH

Chapter 394
MENTAL HEALTH

[View Entire Chapter](#)

394.47891 . Military veterans and servicemembers court programs.—The chief judge of each judicial circuit may establish a Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program under which veterans, as defined in s. [1.01](#); veterans who were discharged or released under any condition; servicemembers, as defined in s. [250.01](#); individuals who are current or former United States Department of Defense contractors; and individuals who are current or former military members of a foreign allied country, who are charged or convicted of a criminal offense, and who suffer from a military-related mental illness, traumatic brain injury, substance abuse disorder, or psychological problem can be sentenced in accordance with chapter 921 in a manner that appropriately addresses the severity of the mental illness, traumatic brain injury, substance abuse disorder, or psychological problem through services tailored to the individual needs of the participant. Entry into any Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program must be based upon the sentencing court’s assessment of the defendant’s criminal history, military service, substance abuse treatment needs, mental health treatment needs, amenability to the services of the program, the recommendation of the state attorney and the victim, if any, and the defendant’s agreement to enter the program.

History.—s. 17, ch. 2012-159; s. 9, ch. 2016-127; s. 1, ch. 2019-61.

Note. From Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program, F.S. §394.47891, 2021

(http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0300-0399/0394/Sections/0394.47891.html). In the public domain.

As of September 2018, there are 31 VTCs functioning in the state of Florida (“Florida Courts,” 2020; see Figure 2). The most recent published statewide data from 2016 shows that all VTCs in Florida admitted 1,090 qualified veteran participants with 640 graduating, a total of 58.72% (“Florida Courts,” 2020).

Figure 2

Map of Active VTCs in Florida

Note. From “Veterans Resource Guide for the Florida State Court System,” by The Office of the State Courts Administrator/Office of Court Improvement Florida Courts, 2017 (https://www.flcourts.org/content/download/217060/file/VETERANS_RESOURCE_GUIDE.pdf.) In public domain, but does not include the updated number of 31 VTCs provided from in the numbers available from the official Florida Courts website (“Florida Courts,” 2020).

Ahlin and Douds (2016) highlighted the concept of veterans' culture that is believed to distinguish it from other specialty courts of similar design. The researchers' used a qualitative approach to identify the influence of a so-called "veterans' culture" as a motivator for veteran enrollment in such a voluntary program. They found that this shared experience of military service and the support of fellow veterans was a primary motivating factor for veterans to volunteer for such a program rather than enter the traditional criminal justice system. This study is different than theirs because I looked at the implementation and performance of Florida's VTCs (a state in which no comprehensive study had been conducted on this topic) rather than rely on the data analysis of a singular VTC in a northeastern state.

In this study, I collected responses for self-identified implementations and outcomes from VTC programs as well as any unique processes that highlighted a creation of the phenomenon of interest in providing an atmosphere specifically designed to meet the cultural and treatment necessities of veterans, centered on the shared military experience. This unique project further advances positive social change by highlighting the results and outcomes of these Florida-based VTC programs that are emerging as a substitute for traditional processing within the criminal justice system and also offering a hybrid of other evolving specialty type courts, like mental health or drug courts.

Problem Statement

An increasing number of military veterans are returning to civilian life following service in active combat zones after the terror attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 (9/11) in New York City and Washington, DC (Rowen, 2020; Russell, 2015).

Numerous veterans, many returning from combat service, are now suffering from grave mental health issues from these experiences in conjunction with other injuries that include major depression, PTSD, and TBI (Russell, 2015). To address the growing needs of this specialized population within state criminal justice systems, beginning in the early 1990s several specialized therapeutic courts were created (Kieckhaefer & Luna, 2020; Lee, 2013).

One of these recent court systems is the VTC, first formed in Buffalo, NY, to mitigate criminal sentences by considering the experiences the defendant brought to the court that was influenced by the effects of military service (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Kieckhaefer & Luna, 2020). Currently, there are over 500 such VTCs in 43 states (Baldwin & Brooke, 2019; Johnson et al., 2015; Rowen, 2020). As Shannon et al. (2017) noted, the major purpose of a VTC is to provide rehabilitation and prevent incarceration of a military veteran for involvement within the criminal justice system. Additionally, research has shown that there is a positive relationship between mental health issues and military service (Van Dykel & Orrick, 2016).

The social contract between the general population and service veterans is the underlying policy rationale for the creation of a specialty treatment court exclusively for veterans in that their service alone creates a mitigating factor for their criminal infractions and will make them eligible for entrance into a specialty court program (Baldwin & Brooke, 2019; Timko et al., 2014). In return for voluntary participation in such a VTC program and its successful graduation, veterans can earn a reduction of charges and a possible reduced sentence (Erickson, 2016). The conditions for admission into certain

VTC voluntary programs require actual combat-related service because the nexus for criminal behavior would potentially limit the number of eligible participants (Shannon et al., 2017). However, this issue was not addressed in the present study because under Florida law admission into a VTC program is not conditioned on actual combat service (Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program, 2020). Additionally, little research exists on the motivating factors that influence veterans who seek treatment in a VTC program (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Baldwin, 2015; Erickson, 2016). The current literature also contains little data on the factors that may have the most influence on the successful completion of a VTC voluntary program (Lennon, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand how Florida's VTC process is implemented as a constructive resolution offering rehabilitation for military service veterans who have committed a criminal offense and find themselves involved in the state's criminal justice system. These VTCs are a relatively new addition to the specialty courts contained within the U.S. criminal justice system; consequently, there is little empirical data that are specifically centered on their implementation and outcomes (Baldwin & Brooke, 2019; Shannon et al., 2017). The findings of this study help fill the gap in understanding how Florida's VTCs are implemented. The focus of the study was exclusively on the functioning VTCs in the state of Florida, currently the state with the third-largest number of veterans (Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, 2020).

Although the data are limited, a recent study showed that VTC programs nationwide claim a recidivism rate of less than 2% compared to that of almost 70% for

general offenders (Frederick, 2014). The results of this study indicate that VTCs have a positive social impact in the state of Florida with its large population of veterans. The shared veterans' culture was found to be critical in how a VTC offers an effective and appropriate method of addressing the needs of those who fall into the criminal justice system due to specific mental health issues that may have developed because of military service, in particular, service in the post-9/11 conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Research Questions

I designed the following qualitative research questions to fill a gap in the existing literature:

RQ1: How is a specific veteran's culture perceived to be a motivating factor in completing a VTC program by a participant in the state of Florida?

RQ2: How are such VTCs in the state of Florida implemented?

Theoretical and/or Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework supporting this study was based on Ahlin and Douds's (2016) theory concerning the existence of a veteran's culture and how immersion into this culture help separate VTCs from other specialty, problem-solving courts that are designed to treat similar populations and similar afflictions. The specifically tailored environment created by a VTC should meet the cultural and treatment needs of military service veterans by focusing on their shared military experience. In this study, I employed the theoretical framework of phenomenology, specifically descriptive phenomenology, which is based on the work of Husserl (see Willis et al., 2016). Descriptive phenomenology establishes the meaning service veterans give to the

phenomenon of veterans' culture and the phenomenon of this shared military experience created by these VTCs on those military veterans who volunteer to be part of a VTC treatment program. The application of this conceptual framework establishes that a veterans' culture is a positive influencer for a successful VTC judicial program completion and that the VTC judges and court administrators believe that they can create such a successful veteran's culture.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative approach. The qualitative data collected involved questionnaire survey responses from identified court personnel and other VTC program administrators but not actual veteran participants enrolled in such a program. I analyzed the collected data through thematic coding. After reviewing the survey responses, codes were created that consisted of one or two words to create categories that summarized the primary topic of that portion of the survey questionnaire or document being analyzed (see Creswell, 2009). A deductive or concept-driven system was created that allowed for the narrow focus on the themes highlighted from existing literature (see Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). These codes were based on terms and the use of topics that are commonly shared and understood among respondents. A final interpretation of the meaning of the data was then made that consisted of the theory-driven deductive code of veterans' culture that reflected the structure of the data (see Creswell, 2009).

Assumptions

There is little extant research on the motivating factors that influence veterans to seek treatment in a VTC program, but the results of this study confirmed the assumption

that the distinct military and/or veteran culture that such a VTC program provides is an external motivator for a veteran to volunteer and complete such a program. The findings of this study further support the assumption that the motivating military culture of success and group mentality contributes significantly to the low recidivism rate. This specialized legal process that is tailored to such a select population (i.e., veterans) can also be viewed through the narrow lens of subtle legal coercion to persuade the offender to volunteer for the program and participate in such treatment offered or face incarceration. This research has helped fill the gap in understanding the effectiveness of Florida's VTCs and the long-term mental health consequences of exposure to military service and engagement with the criminal justice system.

Scope and Delimitations

I designed this study to collect data on the implementation and results of VTCs in treating veterans who have entered into the criminal justice system. Qualitative data were gathered through survey responses from the population under study, which included identified court personnel and other VTC program administrators (but not actual veteran participants) from a selection of varying geographic areas within Florida that currently operate a VTC.

Unlike Ahlin and Douds's (2016) study of veterans' culture in VTCs, which used self-designed, semistructured focus group interviews with both the VTC participants and VTC staff, in the current study, I used a survey questionnaire designed similar to Baldwin's (2015) that contained hybrid, closed, and open-ended questions designed for the population frame (i.e., only court personal and other VTC administrators). Baldwin's

survey design included questions that addressed items such as court description, veteran eligibility, court process, veteran peer mentors, and court supervision. I used questions for self-identified implementations and outcomes from their programs as well as any unique processes that highlight a creation of the phenomenon of interest of providing an environment that is specifically tailored to meet the emotional, cultural, and needs of veterans that is centered on their shared military experiences. Additional background questions were used to gather information to help establish basic data concerning length and branch of prior military service, exposure to combat while in service, and the intersection of those veterans with the criminal justice system as well as general ethnographic trends.

Limitations

The enabling legislation that is used to create Florida's VTCs themselves is problematic due to its vagueness. VTCs in the state of Florida, at any judicial level, are created and formed under Florida state statute F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Programs (2021). This statute allows the chief judge of each judicial circuit within Florida (20 in total) to establish a VTC within that circuit under certain conditions; however, the law does not mandate which court institution (county or circuit) will operate a VTC within the judicial circuit, if that jurisdiction will even extend circuit-wide, if it will only be offered in certain counties if the VTC must offer services to the entire circuit, or if it can be limited to individual counties within that circuit ("Florida Courts," 2020). This potential limitation was addressed as it was encountered during the collection and interpretation of the data.

Although the active VTCs included in this study provided a state-wide geographic representative sample, using only select VTC programs in one state generally limits the applicability of such findings for nationwide application. However, such a study has specific merit because of Florida's large veteran population. According to the Florida Department of Veteran Affairs (2020), there are 1,533,306 veterans within the state, making it the third-largest veteran population in the nation, behind California with 1,755,680 veterans and Texas with 1,670,186 veterans.

Significance

VTCs have emerged as an effective alternative to the traditional processing of criminal offenders and offer a hybrid of other evolving, problem-solving courts (Shannon et al., 2017). The enduring mental health outcomes of experiencing military service, in particular the large number of those who served in post-9/11 conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and the consequences of how that service contributes negatively with interactions in the criminal justice system, must be better understood for a country that has multiple military incursions worldwide. The findings of this study further positive social change because they indicate the results and outcomes of these Florida-based VTC programs that serve as a substitute to conventional offender processing.

Additionally, this research affects positive social change by identifying that Florida VTC programs provide treatment support under circumstances and in an environment designed around an understanding of the unique veteran experience and that is aimed at that specialized population, the military veteran. The findings of this study provide a greater understanding of how and why such Florida VTC programs are

effectively implemented, and this knowledge can then be replicated for future use in other VTCs to minimize recidivism among this target population and reduce incarceration costs for the various state and local criminal justice systems (see Frederick, 2014).

Summary

I conducted this qualitative study to explore the implementation and results of VTCs in treating military veterans who have become involved as offenders within Florida's criminal justice system. Using a convenience selection of representative VTCs spread geographically throughout the state of Florida, survey responses were collected from the identified court or VTC personnel. Gathered responses highlighted self-identified implementations and outcomes from each VTC program selected to participate in addition to any unique processes within that program that showing the creation of the phenomenon of interest at the center of this study, which was providing an environment specifically customized to meet the treatment needs of military veterans that is centered on their shared military experiences. Additional data from the respondents included some basic data concerning length and branch of prior military service, exposure to combat while in service, and the intersection of those veterans with the criminal justice system. . Although VTCs have been growing in establishment, little research has been published that specifically looks at their outcomes and implementations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Following the terror attacks on the United States in Washington, DC and New York City on 9/11, an increasing number of veterans are returning to civilian life after having experienced service in active combat zones (Russell, 2015). As a result, many of these veterans are returning from their military service suffering from serious mental health issues as well as other wounds such as major depression, PTSD, and TBI (Russell, 2015). Since the early 1990s, several specialized therapeutic courts have been developed as part of an effort to address a specific population within the state criminal justice systems (Lee, 2013; Rowen, 2020). These specialized courts, which are often referred to as problem-solving courts, were designed to specifically address the theorized underlying causes of behavior that may make it likely for an individual to become involved within the criminal justice system and have been created in various judicial provinces to address specific social ills, such as substance abuse, mental health issues, and domestic violence, among others (Baldwin, 2015).

VTCs are the latest evolution within the criminal justice system designed specifically to address a population that faces difficulties resulting from their military service (Russell, 2015). They were first created in Buffalo, NY to mitigate criminal sentences by considering the experiences the defendant brought to the court that was influenced by the effects of military service (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Kieckhaefer & Luna, 2020; Rowen, 2020). Currently, there are over 500 such VTCs in 43 states (Johnson et al., 2015; Rowen, 2020). As Shannon et al. (2017) noted, the main purpose of a VTC is to provide rehabilitation and prevent incarceration of a military veteran for involvement in a

criminal justice system. Additionally, data has shown that there is a positive correlation between military service and mental health issues (Van Dykel & Orrick, 2016).

The presumption for establishing such specialty treatment courts exclusively for veterans is the underlining social contract that military service mitigates some level of responsibility for minor infractions of the law or other criminal behavior by performing that military service for the greater community good (Timko et al., 2014). In return for voluntary participation in the program and agreeing to complete it, the veterans may receive reduced charges and/or a reduced sentence (Erickson, 2016). For some VTC programs, the price for admission to this specialty treatment court is much higher, requiring actual combat-related causation to participate within such a program, which drastically limits the number of veterans eligible for participation (Shannon et al., 2017).

The current literature shows a lack of understanding of which factors may have the most influence on the successful participation and completion of a VTC program and the motivating factors that influence veterans to seek treatment in a VTC program (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Baldwin, 2015; Erickson, 2016). Although there is little scholarly research related to the implementation and results of VTCs, there is a great deal of data available on other courts of specialization, particularly mental health and drug courts (Baldwin, 2015). Additionally, much empirical data are available that highlight the underlining causes, such as substance abuse and mental health issues, that trigger interactions between veterans and the criminal justice system (Ahlin & Douds, 2016). Because a VTC is a specialized court that seeks to treat similar issues facing the veteran

population as drug or mental health courts, the literature on specialized courts, VTCs, and veterans' issues faced by these VTCs is reviewed in this chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

Using the databases accessible through the Walden University Library, I conducted a search for relevant scholarly articles concerning VTCs. In particular, the databases of ProQuest, EBSCO, and SAGE were searched. Additionally, combined database searches were completed through Psychology Databases Combined Search and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. A narrowed focus on specific veteran-related topics produced more relevant searches. The keyword terms and phrases searched were *mental health, treatment needs, substance abuse, veterans, veteran treatment needs, psychological treatment needs, specialty courts, veterans' treatment courts, problem-solving courts, veterans and mental health issues, veterans and substance abuse, veterans and incarceration, veterans and crime, mental health courts, and drug courts*. The Boolean operators “and” and “or” were used to increase the potential literature retrieved while still retaining relevant focus to the topic of VTCs; the term “veteran” was included with most of those searches. A search of the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global database produced a total result of six relevant dissertations that were of use for reference to the topic of VTCs; however, as noted earlier, there was little published research on this particular topic, and almost none on the structure and implementation of VTCs across the state of Florida, which further necessitated the need for this study.

Theoretical/Conceptual Foundation

In this study, I used the theoretical framework of phenomenology, specifically descriptive phenomenology, which is based on the work of Husserl (1913-1962) and “has as its aim the description of the essence or essential structure of an experience focusing on what is essential and meaningful” (Willis et al., 2016, p. 1187). Phenomenology refers to the theoretical concept of a phenomenon that conceptualizes how objects and articles play a role in human consciousness (Willis et al., 2016). Descriptive phenomenology helped establish what meaning veterans give to the phenomenon of veterans’ culture and the phenomenon of the shared impact of military experiences and military culture created by these VTCs on the veterans who volunteer to be treated there. This theoretical framework also helped establish that military or veterans’ culture is a positive indicator of successful completion of a VTC program and that the VTC judges and court administrators believe that they can create such a successful culture. The conceptual framework supporting this study was Ahlin and Douds’s (2016) theory concerning the existence of a veterans’ culture and how immersion into this culture helps separate VTCs from other specialty, problem-solving courts created to treat similar populations and similar afflictions. VTCs provide conditions specifically designed toward the treatment and cultural requirements of veterans that are centered on the shared military experiences.

Problem Solving/Specialty Courts

Specialized courts, including mental health and drug courts, developed into a major element of the U.S. criminal justice system in the latter part of the 20th century. There are currently over 3,000 specialty treatment courts within the United States that

center on a problem-solving methodology, the majority of which deal with individuals who find themselves charged with criminal offenses stemming from drug or other substance abuse issues (Boldt, 2014; Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). Specialized courts have also been created to address other areas that are believed to be especially amenable to treatment of the underlining issues that brought the offenders within the criminal justice system (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). These additional specialty courts include juvenile, mental health, homelessness, domestic violence, and veterans, among others (Boldt, 2014; Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). The seminal work on specialty courts was published by Berman and Feinblatt (2001) who described the rise of such courts as “a response to the frustrations engendered by overwhelmed state courts” and “an attempt to achieve better outcomes while at the same time protecting individual rights” (p. 131). Although noting that all such specialty courts are designed to address different problems, to be effective, they all share the same five common elements:

1. A tangible concern for case outcomes. This includes a reduction in recidivism, successful treatment for the offenders, and a reduction in crime within the community.
2. Successful system change. An examination and adoption by authorities of learned best practices concerning addiction and mental illness treatment.
3. Greater judicial monitoring. The continued involvement and supervision of the same judge throughout the process.

4. Greater collaboration between the criminal justice system and other public/private entities and the community.
5. An expansion of nontraditional roles for the legal advisors and other court administrators. (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019).

Although noting at the time that such specialty courts were relatively new as a matter of practice and study, Berman and Feinblatt (2001) observed that such courts were having a palpable positive influence on numerous victims, offenders, and their communities. Of particular concern to the current study of VTCs was the high intersection of drug and mental illness issues that affect the veteran population who are charged as criminal offenders and the work that the creation of mental health and drug courts have offered in the past. This comparatively new creation of VTCs is the direct evolution of the past work of both drug and mental health courts and are modeled after these judicial treatment models (Baldwin, 2015).

Drug Courts

Drug courts were created to address certain behaviors that are associated with interactions with the criminal justice system. Drug courts, in general, were introduced as a form of specialized treatment court to deal with the increasing number of felony drug cases facing the nation's criminal justice system in the 1980s and 1990s (Olson et al., 2001). The nation's first drug court was created in Dade County, Florida, in 1989 and was intended to combine a therapeutic approach to the behavioral issue of drug abuse/addiction with that of enforceable legal punishments (Olson et al., 2001). Since

that time over 3,000 drug courts have been created in the United States and internationally (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019; Zierk, 2019).

The creation of drug courts is intended to help reduce drug offenders from having to be to serve a period of incarceration and to use what is known as “therapeutic jurisprudence techniques” to provide treatment to solve the undelaying issues that cause criminal behavior triggered by drug abuse and/or drug addiction (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019, p. 2). Therapeutic jurisprudence holds that the court system can offer treatment processes to the offender and not compromise its traditional role as the arbitrator of fair and equal due process of justice (Baldwin, 2015). Such drug courts are also evaluated via the concept of “restorative justice,” which calls for the offender, victim, and the community to be made whole again in the course of the usual criminal justice system process and the treatment offered through that system (Baldwin, 2015, p. 713). Both concepts embrace the premise that the criminal justice system itself has a place in providing treatment to those with drug offenses within that system to restore their place within a society (Baldwin, 2015).

Although no specific model for all drug courts has been created, Kaiser and Rhodes (2019, as cited in Kaiser & Holtfreter, 2016) found that the original model used for drug courts contained the key components of a “non-adversarial structure, team decision making, use of non-incarcerative sanctions and incentives, and increased judicial involvement to provide support for offender rehabilitation in a court setting” (p. 2). Today, drug courts continue to operate in much the same way and are designed to give nonviolent offenders with drug addiction issues the opportunity for specifically tailored,

judicially supervised treatment; drug testing; and additional social support within the community rather than a prolonged period of incarceration (Zierk, 2019). Reduced recidivism has been one result of such drug courts when compared to standard criminal justice practices of incarceration for similar offenses (Zierk, 2019). Like VTCs, the goals of drug courts are to reduce incarceration within the criminal justice system by providing this specific population with specialized supervised treatment options (Baldwin, 2015).

Mental Health Courts

Mental health courts, similar to drug courts, were first created in the late 1990s to be a form of a specialized court that seeks to integrate the legal process while offering clinical and community-based treatment instead of standard criminal sentencing and possible incarceration for the offender (Castellano, 2017). These mental health courts also follow the model of therapeutic jurisprudence and were initiated by judges within the criminal justice system who continued to see an increase in offenders whose criminal culpability was often a result of some form of mental disability (Castellano, 2017). While only 2% of the general population is afflicted with some form of serious mental illness, that percentage rises dramatically, up to 10%–15%, for those who are in some form of incarceration (Lamb et al., 1999; Teplin, 1990; Teplin et al., 1996). As such, these mental health courts attempt to offer a collaborative model that incorporates the criminal justice system while offering specifically tailored mental health treatment options as part of an effort to reduce overall incarceration numbers of those who suffer from a mental disability (Canada et al., 2019).

On the limited research reflecting the success of these specific mental health courts, most reflect on their effectiveness by measuring reduced recidivism and the meeting of predetermined treatment goals (Castellano, 2017; Hiday et al., 2016). After almost a decade of monitoring the practice of existing mental treatment courts, the Bureau of Justice Assistance established 10 critical recommendations that should be included in the formation, implementation, and practice of any specifically designed mental health treatment court, including:

1. A broad-based collaborative planning process for a wide variety of shareholders and agreement in the administration of such a court.
2. Define the eligibility requirements of the target population.
3. Participants are identified as early as possible and provided services.
4. Terms of participation are identified and understood by stakeholders.
5. Terms of participation and with addressed and understood by the offender.
6. Individualized treatment plan and services are made available that is evidence-based.
7. Protection of legal rights and confidentiality of participant is observed.
8. Selection and proper training of the court administration team.
9. Continuous review and monitoring of the program to ensure effectiveness.
10. Ensure the program's sustainability over time (Castellano, 2017; Thompson et al., 2007).

As mental health courts have developed, they have followed a model that includes the above-mentioned 10 critical and they were subsequently adopted by the National

Association of Drug Professionals (“Florida Courts,” 2020). These 10 steps are also the same 10 essential components that Florida’s VTCs are suggested to follow and are outlined below. However, because of the great variability in mental health courts construction and composition over various state and local jurisdictions, including the ability in some jurisdictions not to include these 10 components, there is no single model to empirically evaluate (Castellano, 2017; Erickson et al., 2006). This creates a challenge for any uniform evaluation of mental health courts because evidence suggests that the impact of an offender’s participation in such a court may be influenced but certain variables like specific psychiatric diagnosis and how the level (felony vice misdemeanor) of how certain offenses are charged by authorities (Comartin et al., 2015; Ray et al., 2015).

Veteran’s Treatment Courts

A recent addition to the specialty courts is the VTC, first created in Buffalo, NY, to mitigate criminal sentences by considering the experiences the defendant brought to the court that were influenced by the effects of military service (Ahlin & Douds, 2016). VTCs are currently active in 43 states and have over 500 such programs operating in the United States today (Baldwin & Brooke, 2019; Johnson et al., 2015; Rowen, 2020). As previously noted (Shannon, et al., 2017), one of the primary functions of a VTC program, like other specialty courts, is to provide rehabilitation and prevent incarceration of military veterans once they become involved in the criminal justice system. Part of the underlining social contract for the establishment of such a specialty treatment court, with exclusive jurisdiction over veterans, is that their military service in some way mitigates

their level of responsibility for minor infractions of the law or other criminal behavior by performing that military service for the greater community good (Timko et al., 2014).

The exchange for the individual veteran to agree to the terms and conditions of program completion is the opportunity for a reduction in the original charges or possible criminal sentence (Erickson, 2016).

As an alternative to a more traditional criminal intake process, VTCs offer a hybrid of other evolving specialty courts such as Driving Under the Influence (DUI) mental health, or drug courts (Shannon et al., 2017). Shannon et al. (2017) provided information on the history and justifications for the creation of VTCs within state criminal justice systems, possible areas of improvement, and the possible limiting requirement for actual combat-related causation to participate within a VTC program. Baldwin (2015) recognized the deficit of empirical data collected and published on the fairly recently created specialty VTC courts. Ahlin and Douds (2016) provided information on the key variable of veterans' culture that is believed to distinguish it from other specialty courts that are designed to treat similar populations and similar afflictions, such as mental health and/or drug courts. Ahlin and Douds utilized a qualitative study approach to directly gather their data using semistructured interviews and focus groups composed of veterans, court-ordered veteran mentors, and court staff involved in a single veterans' treatment court located in central Pennsylvania. Their goal was to identify the influence of such a veterans' culture as a motivating influence for veteran enrollment in such a voluntary program.

Shannon et al. (2017) noted that despite the pervasiveness of VTCs throughout the state criminal justice systems, there is little empirical evidence that is centered on their implementation and outcomes as compared to other mental health or problem-solving courts, further highlighting the need for this proposed research study. Baldwin (2015) found several similarities as well as wide diversity and variability in the structure and policies of VTCs across the country. In creating the population to be studied, Baldwin recognized 114 VTCs across the United States, with the majority of the states (64%) establishing at least one VTC. Baldwin collected this data for the first comprehensive national study VTCs and produced explanatory findings concerning the structure, establishment, policy, and specific processes of these specialized courts within state criminal justice systems. Baldwin's national survey was administered in 2012 and of the 114 recognized VTCs that were contacted, 79 responded (69%) to the 70 questions divided into five sections concerning eligibility, process, court description, court supervision, and the use of peer mentors. In their research, Shannon et al. (2016) established that the types of military service for participants, their police and court records, and additional data on individual recidivism, produced results that suggested that the variety of rehabilitative services offered, and personal accountability are critical components of success for a VTC participant. Noting that the main objective of the VTCs researched was to provide the veterans with services and that would result in a reduction in the rate of recidivism, Erickson (2016) found that all three VTCs in his study did have a reduction in recidivism in the veterans that were admitted and completed the program.

Smith (2016) found that within the U.S. prison system, veteran demographics currently make up 9% of that population, making them disproportionately overrepresented in prisons while only 7% of the general U. S. population are veteran. While two and half million men and women have served in the military in Afghanistan and Iraq since 9/11, Smith also observes that the reason for veteran overrepresentation in the incarcerated population has not been properly studied. Smith suggests that that the influence of a PTSD diagnosis, status as a veteran, and crime type, influence jurors' decisions, in conjunction with verdict options. Brooke and Gau (2018) and Lee (2013) found a connection between incarcerated veterans and the potential influence that prior military service has on criminal issues, including the various social justifications for allowing veterans to mitigate punishment due to prior military service. Ahlin and Douds (2016) found that this shared experience of military service, and the support of fellow veterans, was a primary motivating factor for veterans to volunteer for such a program vice entering into a more traditional criminal justice process and face possible incarceration. Ahlin and Douds found that a veteran's culture increases the motivation for an individual to participate and complete such a VTC program.

Erickson (2016) did research on three currently operating VTCs to establish if they met their stated mission goals and identified the critical gap in understanding the role of professional prosecutors in the VTC process. Erickson stated that these VTCs were established with the recognition that the military veteran should be treated differently if their non-violent crimes were committed due to mental illness or mental conditions that developed through the conditions of their military service. Shannon et al.

(2017) noted that despite the growing pervasiveness of VTCs throughout the state's criminal justice systems, there is little empirical evidence that is centered on their implementation and outcomes as compared to other mental health or problem-solving courts, further highlighting the need for further research in this growing specialty court.

Existing VTCs in the state of Florida are created under Figure 1. However, little statutory guidance has been promulgated concerning the appropriate level of judicial jurisdiction for such a specialty court in the state of Florida. The appropriate state statute that creates such a specialty court, Figure 1, only establishes that the chief judge of each judicial circuit within Florida (20 in total) may establish a VTC within that circuit under certain conditions. As of September 2018, there are 31 VTCs functioning within the state of Florida ("Florida Courts," 2020). Additionally, guidance provided to Florida's VTCs by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals are modeled after drug courts and suggest 10 key components ("Florida Courts," 2020):

1. The integration of mental health/substance abuse treatment and services into the judicial process.
2. Create a nonadversarial process.
3. Identify those participants that are eligible early in the process.
4. Services continue throughout the process and afterward.
5. Regular alcohol/drug testing for compliance.
6. The coordinated method between all parties.
7. Continued judicial oversight and interaction.
8. Continued evaluation to monitor the effectiveness of the program.

9. Interdisciplinary education.
10. Full partnering with all shareholders in the process.

Specific Veteran Issues

Although the experiences of every war are unique, the results of those experiences cause veterans, especially if they were exposed to the stresses of combat, to face certain issues that are not equivalent in the civilian. Most of the research available focuses on the experiences of Vietnam era service veterans, however, with the vast numbers of returning veterans who served in Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), greater research on these military individuals after September 11, 2001 is emerging (Baldwin, 2015; Kieckhafer & Luna, 2020). In order to understand how such VTC programs can provide judicially supervised treatment, it's crucial to grasp the impact of lasting mental health issues that post-9/11 military service members are facing and their subsequent contribution to negative experiences in the criminal justice system. In particular, suicide is a rising problem, but as Baldwin (2015) noted there is no consensus among the research as to its causation, other than it is increasing within the veteran community at a rate that is 2.5 times higher than that of the general population in the United States (Matarazzo et al., 2017; Rozanov & Carli, 2012). Alcohol and substance abuse are also a continuing issue that leads to behavioral problems resulting in veterans entering into the criminal justice process. There is also a high correlation between military veteran alcohol use disorder and PTSD (Schumm & Chard, 2012; Schumm et al., 2015). Kline et. Al (2009) also found a high correlation between substance/alcohol abuse and mental illness among the military veteran population.

Veteran's Mental Health

Research supports that between 25% - 40% of those veterans returning from deployments in support of post-9/11 military operations have some form of psychological and/or neurological impairment in conjunction with PTSD and/or TBI, with approximately 300,000 returning veterans reporting a TBI since 2001 (Baldwin, 2015; Miles, 2017; Slatore et al, 2018). Recent instances of TBI for OIF/OEF/OND veterans have been found to be that of nearly twice the rate of Vietnam era veterans (Baldwin, 2015). Additionally, approximately 20% of these post-9/11 veterans report having histories of both a TBI and suffering from PTSD (Miles, 2017). Depressive disorders and anxiety are also common with those veterans who have a history of suffering from a TBI (Miles, 2017). A recent study, using a relatively large sample size of OEF/OIF veterans, found that those veterans with a history of a TBI ($n= 1,746$) used greater mental health services than those veterans without a reported TBI (Maguen et al., 2013).

Veterans are a population that face many interconnected issues, many that affect their reintegration into society on their return to civilian life. Baldwin (2015) reported that returning service members have a higher percentage of specific behavioral problems, such as drug addiction, substance abuse, and/or mental health issues, which have been associated with violent behavior (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2009). This puts veterans at a higher risk for committing criminal acts and risk incarceration than the population in general (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2009). This may be directly linked to the higher rate of PTSD and TBI contained within this veteran population, with aggressive behavior being a hallmark of this diagnosis (Sreenivasan et al., & Woehl, 2013). Specifically,

Sreenivasan et al. (2018), noted that “[u]nemployment, homelessness, social disconnection, drug, and/or alcohol abuse are factors associated with an increased risk of veterans returning to criminal behaviors” (p. 163). Sreenivasan et al. (2018) observed that higher rates of incarceration from returning combat veterans are identified as a specific result of multiple and prolonged tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Florida’s VTCs are implemented as a positive solution to reduce recidivism and offer the chance at rehabilitation to veterans who have become involved within the state’s criminal justice system. Although VTCs have been growing in establishment, little research has been published that specifically looks at their outcomes and implementations (Shannon et al., 2017). This study fills the gap in understanding how Florida’s VTCs are operated and implemented concerning the individual veterans who have entered into the state’s criminal justice system. This study used a research method that gained a better understanding of how existing VTC programs in the state of Florida, which currently has the third largest number of veterans within its state population (Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, 2020), are implemented to offer an effective and appropriate method of addressing the needs of these veterans.

Chapter 3: Research Method

VTCs are emerging as an accepted judicial alternative to more conventional criminal processing and offer a hybrid of other evolving specialty treatment courts including mental health, DUI, or drug courts (Kieckhaefer & Luna, 2020; Shannon et al., 2017). Following the terror attacks of 9/11 on the U.S. homeland, numerous U.S. veterans are returning home from their military service suffering from serious injuries that include a host of mental health issues, including major depression, TBI, and PTSD (Rowen, 2020; Russell, 2015). The lasting mental health significance of military service, in particular, the large number of those who served in post-9/11 conflicts, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and the consequences of how that service contributes negatively with interactions in the criminal justice system must be better understood for a country that has multiple military incursions worldwide.

I conducted this study to gain a better understanding of how Florida's VTCs are implemented as a positive solution to reducing recidivism and offering rehabilitation for veterans who have fallen into the state's criminal justice system. Although the growth of VTCs has been dramatic nationwide, little specific research has centered on their outcomes and implementations (Shannon et al., 2017). The findings of this study bridge the gap in understanding how VTCs are implemented within the existing programs operating in the state of Florida, which currently houses the nation's third largest population of veterans (see Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, 2020).

Research Design and Rationale

There is little extant research regarding how nonlegal motivators, such as veterans' culture, support veteran participation in volunteering and completing a VTC program. A greater understanding of the influence that this veteran's culture has on participants within a VTC could be used to help address the gap found in other recent studies of VTCs conducted by Clark et al. (2014), Baldwin (2015), Crawford (2016), Erickson (2016), and Shannon et al. (2017). This concept of a shared veterans' culture is critical in how a VTC offers an effective and appropriate method of addressing the needs of those who fall into the state's criminal justice system specifically due to mental health or other issues that may have developed because of service in the military, particularly in the Iraq and Afghanistan post-9/11 conflicts. I developed the following qualitative research questions to fill this gap in the literature:

RQ1: How is a specific veteran's culture perceived to be a motivating factor in completing a VTC program by a participant in the state of Florida?

RQ2: How are such VTCs in the state of Florida implemented?

For the purposes of this study, I used the definition of VTCs given in the Florida state statute that controls the creation of all VTCs in Florida: F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Programs (2021). Therefore, the identified population for this study was drawn from the 31 VTCs in Florida (Florida Courts, 2020). I chose five active VTCs, from five separate judicial circuits, to provide a geographically representative sample dispersed throughout the state of Florida.

Using a survey design following the guidelines presented by Dillman's et al. (2014) fourth edition of *Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*, I administered a survey instrument using the online, internet-based platform, SurveyMonkey, which allowed me to have great flexibility with the data when coding, interpreting, and displaying the results. This survey instrument was primarily based primarily on Baldwin's (2013) national VTC survey design, which included 70 hybrid and open-response items, including several questions that used a 5-point Likert scale (*never, almost, never, sometimes, almost always, always*). Like Baldwin's survey, the questions asked contained the eight following areas: court description (13 items), eligibility (five items), process (nine items), veteran peer mentors (six items), court supervision (three items), participant demographics (11 items), dynamics and outcomes (five items), and other outcomes and opinions (15 items). Unlike Baldwin's survey instrument, which was designed to collect and analyze data from across a national spectrum on VTCs, the current research was specific to the state of Florida. In Florida, all VTCs are created under the same state statute, making the redesign of certain questions necessary to limit jurisdiction to the state, not the federal judiciary, and to use the correct administrative definitions for Florida's court and state prosecutorial system. Like Baldwin's survey instrument, the survey used in this research study was still limited to under 70 items (i.e., 67 items; see Appendix A).

Once the final VTC population had been identified, I sent a notice of study to the chief judge of each judicial circuit to obtain their permission to conduct such research. The chief judge was then asked to forward the enclosed Participation Agreement to

whomever they deemed appropriate from their pool of VTC administrators to complete the survey instrument. This Participation Agreement also contained an open link to the internet-based platform, SurveyMonkey, for access to complete the survey. Only one executed survey was accepted for analysis in this study from each of the VTCs selected. The first question of the survey instrument contained the statement of informed consent. If the respondent refused to consent to the terms of the informed consent for this study, they were redirected to the end of the survey and were unable to participate in the study. Once participation had been secured, the respondents were able to access the survey, with substantive data being collected starting with Survey Question #2. This internet-based survey helped to elicit superior responses than from more traditional, open-ended, written questions (see Dillman et al., 2014). Some basic introductory and ethnographic data were also gathered from respondents, such as length and branch of prior military service, exposure to combat while in service, and the intersection of those veterans with the criminal justice system, which was useful in placing the study results in a greater context.

Role of the Researcher

Using a phenomenological approach for this study meant that the role of the researcher was to analyze, consolidate, and collect the perceptions of individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon (see Ryan et al., 2015). In this case, the perceptions of the individuals that were collected were those who maintain and administer the treatment court and are, therefore, in the best position to have experienced the specific phenomenon of whether the court has created a veterans' culture and how that is implemented. Use of a qualitative research design is often considered the

appropriate standard for comprehending an individuals' phenomenon experience (Wadams & Park, 2018). The potential for bias existed because of the intimate knowledge I possessed and that of the clients of VTCs being studied regarding their similar military backgrounds. Bias was minimized through recognition of its potential. Where the formation of a familiar unit can "have a powerful influence on shaping the attitudes, cultural values, and behavioral patterns of the entire community," so often values and morals of a particular society are similar in reflecting a consistent pattern of what is considered right and wrong, which can produce bias in the analysis of the researcher (Allen, 2015, p. 290). Additionally, many similar experiences between veterans affect the types of influences on the formation of personal characteristics, such as education, social and cultural upbringing, and other psychological factors, which will all influence the formation of personal values and can produce bias within the researcher who may have had similar influences.

The qualitative research process, like the data collection methods and analysis, reflects the values and opinions of the researcher. The possibility of such bias was recognized in this study. I was transparent and reactive concerning the collection, analysis, and presentation of all data (see Galdas, 2017). It was crucial to recognize the potential for researcher bias in this study and to implement a strategy to minimize its potential (see Wadams & Park, 2018). The issue of researcher bias in qualitative research often lies in the tendency for the researcher to anticipate the desired outcome presented in the data (Morse, 2015). Anticipated outcome bias was recognized to be the most serious potential researcher bias faced in the present study due to the specifics detailed above.

The strategy used to minimize this potential bias is known as bracketing (see Richards & Morse, 2013). Bracketing is a way that the researcher develops through the research process that provides for prior knowledge and personal beliefs about the subject to be excluded from any influence in the study (Richards & Morse). Use of this bracketing strategy was effective because it brought to the forefront any potential, prior-held beliefs highlighting the obvious influence and effect they may have on the research data. I executed this strategy through keeping a journal and field notes that documented my “personal assumptions or beliefs about the study, possible findings, the nature of participant relationships, remedial attitudes, or what role personal experiences may play” (see Wadams & Park, 2018, p. 75). Although the bracketing strategy may not have eliminated all anticipatory outcome bias, it minimized such bias to the extent possible in the current research process (see Wadams & Park, 2018).

Methodology

In this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach and employed a descriptive survey to collect the underlying data. Data were collected on the implementation and outcomes of VTCs in treating veterans who have entered the state of Florida’s criminal justice system. Qualitative data were gathered using survey responses from the theoretical population, which included identified chief judges of every judicial circuit selected, or their designee, such as other VTC program administrators (but not actual veteran participants) that currently operate a VTC created under F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Service Members Court Programs (2021). This generated data provided insight into how a veterans’ culture is created by those that establish and

administer the treatment courts because they are in the best position to gauge the courts' success in creating a viable treatment atmosphere for their veteran participants.

Because one of this study's primary purposes was to establish a thorough description of Florida's VTC programs, most of the results generated were based on the data being descriptive. To describing this existing phenomenon as precisely as feasible, I used surveys to collect such data (see Atmowardoyo, 2018).

A coding process was used as a method of analysis to produce a summary of the empirical material on which conclusions were made and then verified (see Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I used a deductive coding system, also known as concept-driven coding, that was created and used to focus the themes or theoretical concepts that are known to exist from the literature (see Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). This coding process allowed me to summarize the content of the data and highlight the emerging themes that offered insight reflective of the creation of a veterans' culture, as evidenced by the literature, to enhance the operation of a VTC Florida program (see Ahlin & Douds, 2016). Once the qualitative data were coded, content analysis was used to methodically quantify the implications of the textual data (Gummer et al., 2019). In the final interpretation of the data, I identified how immersion into this culture helped separate VTCs from other specialty treatment courts designed to treat similar populations and similar afflictions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness in this qualitative study is illuminated by the confusing statutory underpinnings that create the VTC process within the state's judicial

system. Florida's VTCs are statutorily created and formed under F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Programs (2021). Under this state statute, the chief judge of each of 20 judicial circuits within Florida can establish a VTC within that circuit. However, the law does not mandate at which court level, either the county or circuit, that such a VTC will operate within that judicial circuit. There is also no legislative guidance on if or when such a VTC is to be established, if it is to have circuit-wide jurisdiction, or if it will only be offered in certain counties within that circuit ("Florida Courts," 2020). As a result, the loose statutory requirements for the creation and running of a VTC program within a judicial circuit of Florida may cause an issue in the future with transferability because no two VTC programs in Florida are required to be statutorily identical in creation, staffing, or funding.

However, this statutory confusion has not caused an issue with the credibility of this study. The credibility of this study is formed through the congruent results of the data that establish how the reported findings "hang together" or agree with each other (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). The 5 respondent VTCs represent 5 separate judicial circuits, out of 20, and covered 13 out of the 67 total counties in Florida. However, the responses provided from these five separate VTCs establish remarkably similar results in both the implicit creation of a *veterans' culture* as well as the services provided and successful completion rates. Confirmability of the results is also possible, as the data collected establish that a similar pattern of the creation of a *veterans' culture* is an objective reality created within each VTC that was the subject of this study (Stahl & King, 2020). The dependability of this study was mitigated through the recognition of the potential for

anticipated outcome bias the researcher faced, as noted above, and utilizing a strategy of *bracketing* that was used to minimize such potential bias (Richards & Morse, 2013). I kept a journal and field notes that documented his personal assumptions about possible findings and the nature of participants to help eliminate or minimize such anticipated outcome bias to the extent possible in the research process (Wadams & Park, 2018).

Additionally, although the active VTCs included for this study give a representative geographic sample dispersed throughout the state of Florida, using only select VTC programs in one state generally limits the applicability of such findings, however, such a study has specific merit because of Florida's large veteran population. According to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs (2020), approximately 1,533,306 veterans are residing in the state of Florida. The state ranks third in the total veteran population, behind California with 1,755,680 and Texas with 1,670,186 veterans, respectively. With the state of Florida home to the third-largest veterans' population in the nation, behind California and Texas, this study has merit for other state jurisdictions due to the large concentration of the veteran population contained within.

Summary

The nature of this present study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative data were generated using a questionnaire survey with responses provided from identified court personal other than actual veteran participants enrolled in such a program. This research highlights the positive social impact effectuated by identifying that such treatment support given through a Florida VTC program is provided under conditions tailored to the distinctive social and cultural understanding of Florida's specialized population, the

military veteran. This dissertation study provided a greater understanding of how and why such Florida VTC programs are effectively implemented and this knowledge can then be replicated for future use in other VTCs to implement the positive social change and minimization of recidivism among this target population and reduced incarceration costs for the various state and local criminal justice systems (Frederick, 2014). The results generated from the the data collected for this study support a positive response to the research question that the creation of a specific veterans' culture is a motivating factor in an individual successfully completing a VTC program in the state of Florida.

Chapter 4: Results

The United States has seen a growing number of servicemen and women return from military service, particularly since the attacks of 9/11, and become involved in the criminal justice system. Problem-solving courts were introduced into the criminal justice system in the 1990s and offer specialty treatment designed for a specific population to directly address specific issues that brought the individual into the criminal justice system (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). One such problem-solving court that has evolved from this judicial evolution has been the creation of the VTCs. The purpose of this study was to better understand how Florida's VTC process is implemented as a constructive resolution offering rehabilitation for military service veterans who have committed a criminal offense and find themselves involved in the state's criminal justice system.

In this study, I concentrated on answering the qualitative research questions of how is a specific veteran's culture perceived to be a motivating factor in completing a VTC program by a participant in the state of Florida and how are those same such Florida VTCs implemented. In this chapter, I present the results of the qualitative data collected through an online SurveyMonkey survey given between July and September 2020, with 100% participation from those asked to respond (see Appendix A). The qualitative data presented will indicate that the success of such VTC programs in Florida can partially be attributed to a shared veterans' culture that has been shown to be a positive method of addressing the needs of those who fall into the criminal justice system due to specific mental health issues that may have developed because of military service.

Setting

Within the state of Florida, there are currently 20 judicial circuits (“Florida Courts,” 2020). I chose respondents from five active VTCs that were contained within five separate judicial circuits. Each respondent VTC was created in 2013 or later. Sixty percent of these VTCs were created and maintained at the county level, and 40% were created and operated at the circuit level. While 80% of respondent VTCs meet in court weekly, 20% do so monthly. While 100% stated that they meet as a VTC treatment team to discuss cases weekly but not during court (see Table 1). Respondents indicated that only 40% of their operational budget comes from what the state legislature allocates in its yearly balanced budget, while 40% comes from other local, state, and federal funding, such as grants, and the remaining 20% from donations. Respondents indicated that all their current judges are male and that 80% are military veterans, with 40% being over the age of 60. Additionally, the participants of the VTC court sessions always include the judge, the veteran offender, the public defender, state attorney, Veterans Affairs (VA) justice outreach specialist, veteran peer mentor, court reporter, and a representative from the Florida Department of Corrections. Occasionally, circumstances depending, other entities or individuals will join the proceedings, including private counsel (if engaged), family members, and some community treatment providers.

Table 1*Respondent Courts Characteristics*

Circuit Level	60%
County Level	40%
No. of counties covered	13 out of 67
Year VTC established	40% in 2013 20% in 2014 40% in 2015
Characteristics of VTC judge	100% male 80% veteran 40% over 60 years of age
Court funding	40% state budget 40% from other local/state/federal funding 20% donations
Frequency of VTC meetings	80% weekly 20% monthly
Frequency of VTC meetings to discuss cases (not during court)	100% weekly

Demographics

The respondents indicated the specific eligibility criteria for all veterans who volunteer for participation in a Florida VTC. Although the data collected indicate that 20% of those that responded specifically exclude from their program those veterans who received a dishonorable discharge (DD) or a bad conduct discharge (BCD) for their military service, the law in Florida was changed in October of 2019 to specifically include in VTC eligibility veterans who were discharged or released under any condition

(F.S. §394.47891, as amended by Senate Bill No. 910, 2019). A BCD and a DD are both considered forms of punitive discharges that can only be imposed by a military court-martial; a general court-martial can impose a DD or a BCD, but a special court-martial can only authorize a BCD (Wherry, 2020). Forty percent of respondents did have further restrictions on eligibility that could possibly be related to discharge status (i.e., to exclude those who are not currently VA health care qualified; see Table 2).

Table 2

Eligibility Exclusions

Type of discharge	Bad conduct discharge = 20% Dishonorable discharge = 20%
Individuals that are not VA health care qualified are excluded	40%
Types of offenses	Violent felonies = 100% Nonviolent felonies = 80% Traffic violations = 60% Drug charges = 80% Repeat offenders = 60%
Domestic violence offenses	100% (with 40% requiring the consent of the victim to proceed with the program)
Diagnosis for mental illness	20% mental health or substance abuse diagnosis related to military service

Note. Governor Ron DeSantis has signed SB 910- Court-Ordered Treatment Programs, which expands eligibility for Veterans Treatment Courts to include veterans who were discharged or released under any condition, as well as former U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) contractors and individuals who are current or former military members of a foreign allied country. The bill was effective as of October 1, 2019.

All VTCs responded (100%) that they exclude violent felonies from participation in their programs; however, there are variations on the types of nonviolent felonies that are allowed into each VTC program and other nonfelony offenses, such as traffic

violations (60%), drug offenses (80%), and repeat offenders (60%) (see Table 2). In further breaking down the types of charges an individual veteran may have that will be accepted into a Florida VTC program (i.e., Question 17), 100% of respondents stated they specifically accepted DUI offenses but limit other criminal traffic offenses depending on their severity (i.e., felony or misdemeanor). Additionally, although 100% of VTC respondents allow defendant veterans that have been charged with a domestic violence offense (unless it is charged as a violent felony), 40% specifically require that the victim of such domestic violence agree to allow the veteran to participate in such a program to resolve the charges. Similarly, 20% of respondents stated that a diagnosis for mental health, substance abuse, or TBI relating to service in the military must be established for enrollment in their VTC program.

Of the veterans active in these VTCs themselves, an average of the demographical data provided shows that majority of those who volunteered for a Florida VTC program are male (89.8%) and self-identify as White (65%). The highest number of offenders who volunteer for a Florida VTC program is found within the age range of 31–40 years old. By far, the highest number of veterans who volunteer for a VTC program are veterans of the U.S. Army (45%) who served in a post-9/11 Global War on Terror conflict, such as OEF (i.e., Afghanistan) or OIF or Operation Afghanistan (57%). Additionally, appropriately 75% of these veterans who volunteer for such a Florida VTC come into such a program already suffering from some form of mental health issue (see Table 3).

Table 3*Veteran Demographics*

Sex	Male 89.8%
National origin	White (non-Hispanic) = 65% African American = 30.2% Hispanic = 9% Asian, Pacific Islander = 1.2%
Age	18-20 years = 3.4% 21-25 years = 3.4% 26-30 years = 10.6% 31-40 years = 31.2% 41-50 years = 29.8% 51-60 years = 13.8% 60+ years = 10.2%
Status	Active duty = 3% Reserves = 3.2% Army veteran = 45% Navy veteran = 19.8% Marines veteran = 20.6% Air Force veteran = 10.4% Coast Guard veteran = 2.4% National Guard veteran = 1.8% Post-9/11 conflict = 57% Vietnam = 10.2% First Gulf War = 20% Trauma experience = 68% Substance abuse issues = 77% Homeless/risk of homelessness = 24%

Current enrollment numbers of the five participant VTCs who provided responsive data for this study (through September 3, 2020, when data collection was completed) indicated that throughout their existence (with 40% of those who responded being created in 2013 [see Table 1]) they have had 1,417 cases administered before their respective VTCs. Of those, respondents state that 952 veterans successfully graduated from their respective VTC, which is approximately a 67% graduation rate. Additionally, another 495 veterans are estimated by the respondents to have been eligible for a VTC but chose to go into the more traditional criminal justice system of the state of Florida. Another 33 were estimated to have later decided to opt out of a VTC once accepted to return to a traditional court setting for their case, while 199 were either terminated by court staff or were unable to complete the program at the original VTC (i.e., died while in the program, transferred to another VTCs jurisdiction, etc.). These same respondents stated that they have 248 active cases currently on their dockets (again, through September 3, 2020).

Data Collection

The convenience sample of five active VTCs that were contained within separate judicial circuits represents one fourth of the 20 judicial circuits in the state of Florida, which houses the third-largest state veteran population in the nation (see Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020). Each VTC was geographically dispersed as a representative sample throughout the state and drawn from the 31 active VTCs operating therein. Data were collected through an online SurveyMonkey survey between the dates

of July 20, 2020, and September 3, 2020. All of the VTCs asked to participate do so, and all answered 100% of the questions asked (Appendix A).

The total service area for these five respondent VTCs covered 13 out of the 67 counties in Florida. When using a phenomenological methodology, it is possible to achieve data saturation from a single participant, depending on their expertise and knowledge, however, depending on the research question involved, a minimum of 3 to 10 participants is suggested (Dukes, 1984; Wertz, 2005). Because the number of VTCs is steadily increasing, and with it increased variability of their composition and makeup, the five respondents chosen for convenience represent appropriate data saturation of the VTC surveyed for this study (“Florida Courts,” 2020).

The survey was designed using 67 questions with a series of questions asking the respondents how they perceived certain factors, circumstances, and issues that affect the effectiveness in providing treatment to veterans who participate in their VTC programs. Several of these questions were designed using a 5-point Likert scale, from greatest to least great effectiveness, always present to never present, or definitely yes to definitely no. Additionally, 32 of the questions asked within the survey (Questions 7-9, 13-15, 18-25, 27-28, 39-40, 54-55, 57, 59, 61-63, 65-68, see Appendix A) contained the option for the respondents to provide open-ended comments designed to solicit qualitative responses that would offer data reflective of a *veterans’ culture* and insight into the creation of a veterans’ culture that would enhance the operation of a VTC program.

A coding process on these open-ended comments was used to summarize their content and to highlight the emerging themes. This process is explained in greater detail

further in this chapter. In summary, this coding process is a method of analysis that produced a summary of the empirical material on which conclusions can be made and then verified (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). In this case, a deductive coding system, or concept-driven coding, was used that would allow for the narrow focus of the themes and theoretical concepts that are known to exist from the literature (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Using this thematic analysis as a method of analyzing this qualitative data, the theme *veterans' culture* as evidenced by the literature (Ahlin & Douds, 2016), was used as the deductive predetermined coding method in creating a codebook to guide the data processing gathered from the respondents. No variations from the collection process proposed in Chapter 3 were necessary, and there were no unusual circumstances encountered or observed during the data collection for this study.

Data Analysis

Past research indicates that there is much reporting on the creation of VTCs, nationwide and only limited nationwide studies on the effectiveness of such courts (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Erickson, 2016; Russell, 2015);. Such research contains specific data concerning statistics on treatment and judicial results, but little on the non-legal motivations for volunteering for a VTC program (Baldwin, 2015; Shannon et al., 2017). Although no precise and single definition of the term *veterans' culture* exists, the literature supports the conceptual theory that *veterans' culture* is a form of identity. Identity is a social and political definition, which may be changeable and fluid over time, but shared military service creates a distinctive culture that retains its unique features of soldiers' cooperative situation that transcends traditional national borders (Christensen,

2020). Veterans of the U.S. military have been identified as a distinct and specific *cultural group* (Shari, 2017, p. 438). Although diverse in make-up, this population is unified by the influence of past military service as the defining experience in their individual lives (Shari, 2017). Constructed of both implicit and explicit components that contain their own rituals, symbols, customs, and norms, that separate it from other organizations, the single most important theme of camaraderie is being often identified as the essence of past military service (McCormick et al., 2019). This is reinforced by social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972) where an individual's social identity is a function of their sense of belonging to an associated group (Russell & Russell, 2018). Therefore, *veterans' culture* is defined as shared military experience that produces a sense of responsibility for cooperation, regardless of cultural or personal differences, to accomplish mission objectives. This social identity of group identification through association with a veteran's community or *veterans' culture* can play a positive role in mental health outcomes (Russell & Russell, 2018).

Thirty-two of the questions asked within the survey (Questions 7-9, 13-15, 18-25, 27-28, 39-40, 54-55, 57, 59, 61-63, 65-68, Appendix A) contained the option for the respondents to provide open-ended comments designed to solicit qualitative responses that would offer data reflective of a *veterans' culture* and insight into the creation of a *veterans' culture* that would enhance the operation of a VTC program. This *veterans' culture* is created from a sense of shared military experience and produces a sense of responsibility for cooperation, regardless of cultural or personal differences, to accomplish mission objectives (McCormick et al., 2019; Shari, 2017). Specifically, the

significance of a successful program appears to be in creating an agenda that creates this sense of *veterans' culture*, such as using specific tools like veteran peer mentors, as noted above. This data was collected contained open-ended comments that contained qualitative data reflective of a *veterans' culture* (Appendix A). A qualitative analysis of these participant perceptions responses was conducted to identify themes consistent with the concept of the creation of a *veterans' culture*. The predetermined thematic code of a *veterans' culture* is supported by past research on VTCs (Ahlin & Douds, 2016). This qualitative research method, including this survey data that involved these subjective descriptions, assisted in compiling the complex and layered character of the individuals involved and social influences of such a VTC program (Miner-Romanoff, 2012).

This use of interpretive phenomenological analysis in this data was specifically explained by Miner-Romanoff (2012), who stated that “Although many qualitative research methods provide rich and detailed personal accounts of particular problems and societal issues, phenomenological studies are particularly appropriate for addressing specific knowledge and participants’ detailed subjective experiences” (p. 7). An interpretive phenomenological analysis in the instant case, using this qualitative survey design, provided an examination of the veteran shared experience of the volunteers for a VTC program in Florida (Miner-Romanoff, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). This qualitative research method, including this data that involved these subjective descriptions, assisted in compiling the complex and layered character of the individuals and social influences of creating a culture responsive to the specific treatment of veterans.

A coding process on these open-ended comments was used to summarize their content and to highlight the emerging themes. The process of coding is a method of analysis that will produce a summary of the empirical material on which conclusions can be made and then verified (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). In this case, a deductive coding system, or concept-driven coding, was used that would allow for the narrow focus of the themes and theoretical concepts that are known to exist from the literature (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Using this thematic analysis as a method of analyzing this qualitative data, the theme *veterans' culture* as evidenced by the literature (Ahlin & Douds, 2016), was used as the deductive predetermined coding method in creating a codebook to guide the data processing gathered from the respondents. The final codebook consisted of the theory-driven deductive code of *veterans' culture* that reflected the structure of the data collected from the respondents. This data supports a positive response to the research question that the creation of a specific veterans' culture is a motivating factor in an individual successfully completing a VTC program in the state of Florida. Table 4 displays a summary of the results once the code label and definition were established with selected example quotes to best illustrate the theory-driven deductive code chosen.

Table 4*Theory Driven Deductive Code of Veterans Culture, Descriptions, Examples, and Themes*

Deductive code	“Veterans Culture” as evidenced by Ahlin & Douds (2016); Shannon et al. (2017).
Description	Shared military experience that produces a sense of responsibility for cooperation, regardless of cultural or personal differences, to accomplish mission objectives (McCormick et al., 2019; Shari, 2017).
Positive support examples	<p>“Veteran Peer Mentors are essential to the VTC program.”</p> <p>“[S]upportive team to encourage them along the way.”</p> <p>“We have been blessed with a team that sees the value in treatment and works well together to help the Veteran get needed help.”</p>
Negative support examples	<p>“A strong support system from the VTC team.”</p> <p>“Veterans that want to get out and go back to the trial division because they don’t like all the requirements.”</p> <p>“Lessons learned: Some of the mentors we initially identified talked a good game but didn’t engage. Prior VTC graduates do not always make a good mentor.”</p>
Theme	The creation of a “Veteran Culture” within the VTC was a major component of what court administrators believed made the program successful.

Table 5 displays a further breakdown of the coding that was done in support of establishing the theme from the predetermined deductive code of *veterans' culture* that its creation was a positive and key reason, at least from the court administrators and VTC judges, for the success of their program. Words or fragmentary phrases were drawn out from within each separate comment, where they were located, that were similar in theme in their narrative support for the concept of a *veterans' culture*. These words or fragmentary phrases provided by VTC court administrators were overwhelmingly positive in their support of the theme that the creation of a *veterans culture* within a VTC is a major component of what court administrators' believed made the program successful.

Table 5

Deductive Code Support of the Theme that the Creation of a Veterans' Culture within a VTC is a Major Component of What Court Administrators' Believed Made the Program Successful.

Number of narrative questions	32
Number of individual comments	123
Number of words or fragmentary phases found to have positive support deductive code of <i>veterans' culture</i> to support theme	76
Number of words or fragmentary phases found to have negative support on deductive code of <i>veterans' culture</i> to support theme	14

Additionally, a separate narrative question (Q27) concerning the creation by each VTC of phased justice approach to treatment. Each of the respondents to the survey was asked specifically to describe the reward and/or sanction ladder or system of treatment

phases that their VTC uses in delivering specifically tailored treatment for individual veteran participants. Shannon et al. (2017) found that one of the hallmarks of a successful VTC in reducing recidivism was the use of a reward system for individual participants. These rewards could be as simple as verbal praise from the veterans' court team to a reduction in the number of times a drug screen needs to be complied with (Shannon et al., 2017).

In this study, the respondents provided data that show all have established a form of incremental system that offers rewards and sanctions that differ based on where each veteran is in the program and their performance in meeting the program requirements. Respondents offered forms of a sanction program that ranged from no formal phases, but rather a continuous graduated sanctions/incentive program until graduation to a formal four or five phased program that offered specific treatment and program targets before an individual could advance to the next phase. Using the same coding process that was created and highlighted above, the deductive predetermined thematic code of a *veterans' culture* found further in support of the theme that the creation of a *veterans' culture* within a VTC is a major component of what court administrators' believed made the program successful, overwhelmingly so (see Table 6).

Table 6*Reward/Sanction Ladder or System of Treatment Phases VTC Uses*

Deductive code	“Veterans Culture” as evidenced by Ahlin & Douds (2016); Shannon et al. (2017).
Description	Shared military experience that produces a sense of responsibility for cooperation, regardless of cultural or personal differences, to accomplish mission objectives. (Shari, 2017; McCormick et al., 2019).
Positive support examples	<p>“We give certificates out at each Phase change, verbal applause.”</p> <p>“They receive incentives such as being called earlier, leading the court in the Pledge of Allegiance, reduced court appearances.”</p>
Negative support examples	“The sanctions and incentives are graduated and increase in severity with the frequency of the positive/negative behavior.”
Theme	The creation of a “Veterans Culture” within the VTC was a major component of what court administrators believed made the program successful.

The data collected for this study support a positive response to the research question that the creation of a specific *veterans’ culture* is a motivating factor in an individual successfully completing a VTC program in the state of Florida. This data offers insight into the creation of a *veterans’ culture* that would enhance the operation of a VTC program. These results highlight that those judges and other court administrators that run such Florida VTC programs feel that this shared *veterans’ culture* is created from a sense of shared military experience and produces a sense of responsibility for

cooperation, regardless of cultural or personal differences, to accomplish mission objectives (McCormick et al., 2019; Shari, 2017).

Although past research has centered the creation of VTCs nationally, there is only limited research in the literature on the effectiveness of such courts (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Erickson, 2016; Russell, 2015), with little analysis on the nonlegal motivations for volunteering for a VTC program (Baldwin, 2015; Shannon et al., 2017). The present study offers data reflective of a veterans' culture and insight into the creation of a *veterans' culture* that would enhance the operation of such a Florida VTC program, but certainly has implications for such programs nationwide. Although lacking in precise definition, research shows that *veterans' culture* exists and that it is found to be a form of culture of identity that displays the cooperative nature of U.S. military veterans identify as a distinct and specific "cultural group" (Shari, 2017, p. 438). This group identification through association with a veteran's community or *veterans' culture* can play a positive role in mental health outcomes, particularly in the instant case, that of VTCs in Florida (Russell & Russell, 2018).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As noted in Chapter 3, the issue of trustworthiness for such a qualitative study on Florida VTCs has the potential to prove problematic. Primarily, this is due to the statutory underpinnings that create the VTC process within the judicial framework within the state's judicial system. As previously noted, Florida's VTCs themselves are created and formed under Florida state statute F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Programs (2021). Under this state statute the chief judge of each

judicial circuit within Florida, 20 in total, can establish a VTC within that circuit.

However, the law does not mandate at which court level, either the county or circuit level, will such a VTC will operate within the judicial circuit or even if that jurisdiction will even extend circuit-wide, or will only be offered in certain counties within that circuit (“Florida Courts,” 2020). As a result, the loose statutory requirements for the creation and running of a VTC program within a judicial circuit of Florida may cause an issue in the future with transferability, as no two VTC programs in Florida are required to be statutorily identical in creation, staffing, or funding.

This statutory confusion did not caused an issue with the credibility of this study. The credibility of this study was formed through the congruent results of the data that established how the reported findings “hang together” or are in agreement with each other (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). Using triangulation in the data collection, the responses provided from five separate Florida VTCs in five separate judicial circuits establish remarkably similar results in both the implicit creation of a *veterans culture* as well as the services provided and successful completion rates. Confirmability of the results is also possible, as the data collected establish that a similar pattern of the creation of a *veterans’ culture* is an objective reality created within each VTC that was the subject of this study (Stahl & King, 2020). The dependability of this study was mitigated through the recognition of the potential for anticipated outcome bias the researcher faced in the present study, noted in Chapter 3, in which a strategy of *bracketing* was used to minimize such potential bias (Richards & Morse, 2013). I kept field notes that documented my personal assumptions about possible findings and the nature of participants to help

eliminate or minimize such anticipated outcome bias to the extent possible in the research process (Wadams & Park, 2018).

Additionally, as also noted in Chapter 3, potential trustworthiness is raised by the geographic limitations presented by the study that contains only data generated from one U.S. state. This is mitigated by the convenience sample representing appropriate data saturation chosen from five separate VTCs with a service area covering 13 out of the 67 counties in Florida. With the state of Florida home to the third-largest veterans' population in the nation, behind California and Texas, this study has merit for other state jurisdictions due to the large concentration of the veteran population contained within.

Results

The data collected for this study support a positive response to the research question that the creation of a specific veterans' culture is a motivating factor in an individual successfully completing a VTC program in the state of Florida. In answering the research question concerning the implementation of Florida's VTC, one aspect of a problem-solving court is offering the specialty treatment that is designed for that specific population to directly address issues that brought the individual within the criminal justice system (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, one common element of all specialty or problem-solving courts is an expansion of nontraditional roles for the legal advisor and other court administrators (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). VTCs, such as the ones in the present study offer such specifically designed nontraditional treatments that, in return for voluntary participation and completion may result in reduced charges or a reduced sentence (Erickson, 2016). The

respondents, the VTC court administrators, offered a variety of treatments and services made available to veterans who volunteer to participate in such a program in the Florida criminal justice system (see Table 7). These services included the expected treatment in mental health services, as well as both inpatient and outpatient substance abuse treatments (100%), but also expands the more non-traditional roles of the court administrators to allow them to offer other treatments in the hope to reintegrate the individual veteran to society and prevent incarceration or further involvement in the criminal justice system (Shannon et al., 2017). Such treatments include educational or other community assistance (60%) as well as housing and/or transportation assistance (60%), but also the more specific offering of peer mentoring (100%) that also reinforces the supposition that VTCs are different from other problem-solving courts because of the creation of a *veterans' culture* within the immersion of their own VTC administration (Ahlin & Douds, 2016).

Table 7*Treatments and Services Available*

Mental health services	100%
Substance abuse treatment (detox)	100%
Substance abuse treatment (inpatient)	100%
Substance abuse treatment (outpatient)	100%
Peer mentoring	100%
Vocational training/services	100%
Various outside agencies who work with VTCs to provide aid	100%
Educational assistance, other community assistance	60%
Housing/transportation assistance	60%

Along with the specific services and treatments offered for VTC veteran participants, a hallmark of specialty or problem-solving courts like VTCs is to strive for objectives for their participants' additional medical and mental health treatments made available (Shannon et al., 2017). Such VTC objectives include jail/prison diversion (100%), charges dropped (100%), a reduction in charges (80%), and/or a withholding of adjudication of criminal charges (80%). Additionally, specific respondents commented that they seek to assist in reducing possible fines and fees and to provide individual veterans with information concerning their possible VA benefits (see Table 8).

Table 8*VTC Objectives (Other Than Treatment)*

Jail/prison diversion	100%
Charges dropped	100%
Reduced charges	80%
Withhold adjudication	80%

Note. Additional comments from respondents also include a reduction in fees/fines and the desire that veterans get information on possible VA benefits and a “Connection to necessary therapeutic, medical, and community services as needed.”

For the VTC to understand and make advancement forward on each veteran’s case toward completion and graduation the court must rely on a variety of sources to receive that information. VTCs provide several supervising agents who provide the court with periodic status reports of the progress each veteran is making in the treatment program. This variety of supervision agents, both formal and informal, reports status and/or progress to the court on a weekly or monthly, including the state attorney (60%), the public defender (80%), private defense counsel (60%), VA veterans justice outreach (100%), VA benefits (60%), other VA representatives (40%), treatment providers/counselors (100%), social workers (60%), veteran peer mentors (100%), and others (80%). These additional supervising agents include such as representatives from the pretrial supervision staff, county Veterans Service Officer, and other program or case managers. Means by which more formal supervision techniques are administered are contained in Table 9.

Table 9*VTC Formal Supervision Process*

Drug screening	100%
Medication screening	60%
Housing checks	100%
Curfew checks	40%
Employment checks	60%
Electronic monitoring	60%
GPS monitoring	60%
Reporting to an agency on a regular basis	60%
Verify treatment attendance	80%
Other	20%

Note. The 20% described as “other” was not further explained.

Respondents indicate that individuals are initially introduced to the possibility of entering a VTC program at several stages, depending on the circumstances of the arrest or entry into Florida’s criminal justice system. Veteran status is attempted to be identified with the individual at the earliest level possible, with 60% being identified at the arrest and 100% being identified as a veteran by at the time of their first court appearance or arraignment. Shortly into the criminal justice process individuals are introduced by a variety of methods to determine if they are eligible to have their case taken by their applicable VTC within their jurisdiction. Of the VTC administrators who participated in this study, 40% indicate that veterans are informed about the possibility of volunteering for a VTC to dispose of their criminal charges by a private defense attorney, while 80%

state that veterans are originally determined to be eligible for such a program from either the state attorney (80%), VTC administrators and/or coordinators (80%) or another VA representative (80%).

Once determined to be eligible for an appropriate VTC program the veteran is then screened by an evaluator to determine the appropriate services and treatments needed to be provided to have the potentially best results. 40% of VTC court administrators state that the responsibility for this initial evaluation treatment screening is done equally by a VA treatment provider, other VA representatives, or another community treatment provider. This initial screening establishes the specific services and treatment areas that are discussed with the incoming VTC participant (see Table 10).

Table 10*Initial Screening Areas Explored*

Mental health	100%
Substance abuse	100%
Housing	80%
Trauma experience	100%
Domestic relations	80%
Social support	80%
Physical health	100%
Employment	80%
Education	60%
Military service history	20%

It is also during this initial screening process the individual veterans are informed of their obligations and responsibilities if they are accepted into such a program. In return for voluntary participation in such a program they could receive reduced charges and/or a criminal sentence (Erickson, 2016). This voluntary acceptance of these special rules for acceptance into a VTC further underscores the importance of the creation of a *veterans' culture* and the presumption that such a specialty treatment court exclusively for veterans is part of the underlying social contract that military service may mitigate the level of criminal responsibility for minor criminal infractions for the greater social good (Timko et al., 2014). These participation requirements are contained in Table 11.

Table 11*Participation Requirements*

Agree to participate in treatment	100%
Agree to regular drug/alcohol testing	100%
Sign a contract	100%
Frequently appear in court	100%
Check-in regularly with a member of the veterans' court outside of scheduled treatment	100%

Note. Contract includes a release of information for all medical and treatment providers.

Like the participation requirements that a veteran must agree to before entering a VTC program are the specific program requirements that must be completed before completion or graduation once the court treatment program has begun (see Table 12). Additionally, 100% of VTCs use a form of reward or sanction progressive ladder system of treatment phases that the veteran passes through on his or her way toward graduation. The actual termination of a veteran from such a VTC program, before completion or graduation is done for a variety of reasons. These terminations by the VTC may be triggered by; a violation of probation (100%), nonparticipation in treatment (100%), failure to appear in court (60%), a commission of a new criminal offense (80%), re-arrest for a different offense (60%), re-arrest for the same offense (20%), and various undisclosed reasons for termination (20%).

Table 12*Graduation Requirements*

Complete terms of probation (for those who are placed on probation)	40%
Complete court mandates (restitution, fines/fees, get driver's license, etc.)	80%
Achieve stable housing situation	40%
Complete treatment requirements	100%
Treatment evaluation state improvement	20%
ALL members of the VTC team (judge, attorneys, VA representative, etc.) agree the veteran has completed all requirements	20%
MOST (a majority) of the members of the VTC team (judge, attorneys, VA representative, etc.) agree the veteran has completed all requirements	80%

Note. Some treatments cannot be completed (like mental health medications), but should be compliant with appointments.

All respondent VTC's utilize paid veteran peer mentors (100%), with 40% stating that they also utilize volunteers, which include the additional use of veteran peer mentors provided by the VA. These volunteer peer mentors are enlisted through various community outreach programs and other recruitment methods, and pending background screening and training participate in the VTC program. The respondents' use various means to assign those veteran peer mentors to individual veteran defendants, the majority (60%) through a screening process that is determined entirely by a court staffer administrator, such as the veterans' treatment mentor coordinator or court coordinator,

the remainder (40%) through a court team collaboration process that looks at a variety of factors to try and create a workable and favorable match.

All respondents made positive comments (Q34) concerning the creation and use of the veteran peer mentor program. However, several respondents (40%) made comments concerning the quality of the peer mentors that they had used in the past, specifically lamenting that stating that “[p]rior VTC graduates do not always make a good mentor.” Additionally, the very specific complaint was noted from 20% of the VTC respondents that providing and maintaining the availability of female veteran mentors has been a difficult challenge.

Additionally, a series of questions were asked to the respondents concerning how they perceived certain factors, circumstances, and issues affect the effectiveness in providing treatment to veterans who participate in their VTC programs. Several of these questions were designed using a 5-point Likert scale, from greatest to least great effectiveness, always present to never present, or definitely yes to definitely no. These responses indicate that the respondents felt overall their programs were “very effective” (80%) in their overall treatment of the veterans in their charge, as well as in operating their veteran peer mentoring programs. Additionally, it was the opinion of those who responded, the judges or court administrators of the VTC programs themselves, that they were less effective in completing their overall mission than that of the individual success they feel were delivered for the program participants (see Table 13).

Table 13*VTC Administrators Opinions on Outcomes*

Overall treatment of veterans	Very Effective 80% Effective 20%
Veterans mentoring program	Very Effective 20% Effective 80%
Achieving its mission	Very Effective 60% Effective 40%
Communication between VTC court team members	Very Effective 60% Effective 40%
Communication between VTC and outside agencies	Very Effective 40% Effective 60%
Past military service caused issues for VTC placement	Definitely Yes 20% Probably Yes 60% Maybe 20%

Summary

The instant study was specifically designed to highlight the dynamics of VTCs in the state of Florida only, which currently possesses the third largest population of veterans within the country (Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, 2021). This study helps establish that the effectiveness of such a specialized court is based, in part, on addressing the underlining behavioral causes that led to criminal charges and its intersection with the shared experiences of a *veteran culture* (Ahlin & Douds, 2016, p. 93; Frederick, 2014). This research has helped in understanding how Florida's VTCs are implemented through the perceived creation of a *veterans' culture* and the outcomes recorded for military service and involvement within the criminal justice system in Florida. The data collected for this study support a positive response to the research

question that the creation of a specific *veterans' culture* is a motivating factor in an individual successfully completing a VTC program in the state of Florida.

Chapter 5: Implications/Conclusions/Discussion

Particularly since the attacks of the United States on 9/11, the country has seen a growing number of servicemen and women return from service and become involved in the criminal justice system. Since the 1990s, problem-solving courts have been introduced into the criminal justice system in the United States that offer specialized treatment that is designed for a specific population to directly address issues that brought the individual within the criminal justice system (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). One such problem-solving court that has evolved from this judicial transformation is the creation of the VTC. VTCs offer such specifically designed, nontraditional treatments that, in return for voluntary participation and completion, may result in reduced charges or a reduced sentence (Erickson, 2016). I conducted this study to determine how such VTCs were implemented and how a specific veteran's culture is perceived to be a motivating factor in completing such a VTC program. It is believed that the effectiveness of such a specialized court is based, in part, on addressing the underlining behavioral causes that led to criminal charges and its intersection with the shared experiences of a veterans' culture (Ahlin & Douds, 2016, p. 93; Frederick, 2014).

The state of Florida currently houses the third-largest number of veterans (Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, 2020). The criminal justice system in the state utilizes a VTC program that was created under the statutory authority of F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program (2021). This statute states that the chief judge of each of the 20 judicial circuits within the state may establish a VTC within that circuit under certain conditions, including acceptance of veterans and servicemembers

based, among other things, on their military service, criminal history, substance abuse, mental health treatment needs, the veteran defendant agreeing to participate in such a program, and the recommendation of the state attorney and the victim, if any.

The data collected in this qualitative study indicate that the creation of a specific veterans' culture is a motivating factor in an individual successfully completing a VTC program in the state of Florida. The findings of this study also offer insight into the creation of a veterans' culture that would enhance the operation of a Florida VTC program, further supporting the effective implementation of such programs. These results highlight that those VTC judges and other court administrators that run Florida VTC programs feel that this shared veterans' culture is created from a sense of shared military experiences and produces a sense of responsibility for cooperation, regardless of cultural or personal differences, to accomplish mission objectives (see McCormick et al., 2019; Shari, 2017).

Interpretation of Findings

In the state of Florida, there are 20 judicial circuits in the state. In this study, I chose respondents from five active VTCs that were contained within separate judicial circuits. This convenience sample represented one fourth of all the judicial circuits in the state of Florida (see Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). Each VTC was geographically dispersed as a representative sample throughout the state and drawn from the 31 active VTCs operating therein. Data were collected through an online SurveyMonkey survey instrument between the dates of July 20, 2020, and August 31, 2020. All of the VTCs asked to participate responded, and all answered 100% of the

questions asked (see Appendix A). Each respondent VTC was created in 2013 or later. Sixty percent of these VTCs were created and maintained at the county level, and 40% were created and operated at the circuit level.

The current literature shows a lack of understanding of which factors may have the most influence on the successful participation in and completion of a VTC program. Although there is little scholarly research on the implementation and results of VTCs, there is a great deal of data available on other courts of specialization, particularly mental health and drug courts (Baldwin, 2015). One common element of all specialty or problem-solving courts is an expansion of nontraditional roles for the legal advisor and other court administrators (Kaiser & Rhodes, 2019). This is also the case for VTC programs; however, there is little research on the motivating factors that influence veterans to specifically seek treatment in a VTC program (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Baldwin, 2015; Erickson, 2016). The respondents in the current study, the VTC court administrators, offered a variety of treatments and services made available to veterans who volunteer to participate in a VTC program in the Florida criminal justice system. Additionally, data from respondents in this study showed that a successful program appears to be produced through an agenda that creates this sense of veterans' culture, such as using specific tools like veteran peer mentors and other specific tools, as discussed in Chapter 4.

In this study, I carried out a qualitative, interpretive, phenomenological analysis using a survey design to explore the shared experience of the volunteers for a VTC program in Florida (see Miner-Romanoff, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The results showed

that such a program can be successful through the creation of this veterans' culture. Treatments that successfully create and maintain such a veterans' culture within these VTCs are different from other problem-solving courts and include veteran peer mentoring, educational/community assistance, housing, and/or transportation assistance. As discussed in Chapter 4, such programs and treatments require voluntary compliance to special rules for acceptance into a VTC, which further underscores the importance of the creation of a veterans' culture and the presumption that such a specialty treatment court exclusively for veterans is part of the underlying social contract that military service may mitigate the level of criminal responsibility for minor criminal infractions for the greater social good (see Timko et al., 2014). This is further established by the high completion and graduation rates evidenced in the results; of the estimated 1,417 cases administered before these respective VTCs, 952 individuals successfully graduated from their respective VTC, which is approximately a 67% graduation rate.

Limitations of the Study

The enabling legislation that creates Florida's VTCs is problematic due to its vagueness. In the state of Florida, VTCs at any judicial level are created and formed under F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Programs (2021). This statute allows the chief judge of each judicial circuit within Florida (20 in total) to establish a VTC within that circuit under certain conditions; however, the law does not mandate which court institution (i.e., county or circuit) will operate a VTC within the judicial circuit, if that jurisdiction will extend circuit-wide, if it will only be offered in certain counties, if the VTC must offer services to the entire circuit, or if it can be limited

to individual counties within that circuit (“Florida Courts,” 2020). I explain this statutory limitation in greater detail in the following section as a potential recommendation for further changes to increase the potential effectiveness and reach of Florida’s VTCs.

The qualitative data were generated using a survey instrument specifically designed to solicit personal accounts of subjective experiences (see Miner-Romanoff, 2012). A qualitative survey can be used to study diversity and vice distribution in each population (Jansen, 2010). However, Jansen (2010) also noted that the actual term qualitative survey is seldom referenced as a research tool in textbooks on qualitative research methods or in those related to general social research methodology . A qualitative survey was utilized as appropriate to gauge the phenomenology from the point of view of the judges and court administrators from each VTC while also preserving confidentiality because each respondent was selected by the chief judge of each judicial circuit invited to participate in the study. The data submitted were subjective, coming directly from the chief judge or their direct delegate to complete the survey instrument, so it represents the point of view of “if” veterans’ culture was created, not whether they specifically realized it or not, and the term veterans’ culture appeared nowhere in any of the survey responses. The responses generated were not from how veterans themselves viewed the program. Additionally, these responses may have been limited in gender diversity because the data generated established that all judges who currently preside over these VTC programs are all male (100%).

Additionally, although the active VTCs participants for this study gave a state-wide geographic representative convenience sample, using only select VTC programs in

one state generally limits the applicability of such findings for nationwide application. However, such a study has specific merit because of Florida's large veteran population. According to the Florida Department of Veteran Affairs (2020), there are 1,533,306 veterans within the state, making it the third-largest veteran population in the nation behind California with 1,755,680 veterans and Texas with 1,670,186 veterans.

Recommendations

One major problem with the uniform implementation of a VTC created under Florida state law is the lack of legislative and judicial guidance, regulation, and oversight once a VTC has been constructed in a particular judicial circuit. The enabling legislation that creates Florida's VTCs themselves is problematic due to its vagueness. The simple solution would be to make VTCs mandatory for all judicial circuits in the state of Florida, but further study is necessary to determine if VTCs should be housed at the circuit-level of court or in a hybrid method to ensure the greatest availability to the state's veterans who qualify for such a specialty court.

In conjunction with the issue of statutory creation of Florida VTCs is the question of funding and oversight for such programs. Currently, under F.S. §394.47891, Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program (2021), no additional funding is provided by the Florida Legislature to the Florida judicial system to create and operate Florida VTC programs (HB 5001, Florida General Appropriations Act, 2020). This lack of appropriate funding was noted by more than one of the respondents in response to Question 68: "What challenges do you see the veteran's treatment court team currently facing?" Because the statute creating Florida's VTCs is so vague in oversight,

implementation, and funding, further research is needed to determine how best the Florida Legislature can amend the current law to provide more specific guidance on the creation of such programs and determine the appropriate level of funding needed to establish such VTCs in all 20 judicial circuits at a minimum.

Additionally, greater gender diversity is needed in VTC administration and peer mentoring to create a *veteran's culture* that also encompasses the growing gender diversity within the U.S. military forces. VTCs across the nation have reported increases in their female veteran population (Kelber et al., 2021). By 2010, 11.7% of deployed U.S. service members were women, with more than 250,000 women being specifically deployed in support of military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kelber et al., 2021). Since the military interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, 161 women have been killed and over 600 have been wounded in action (Department of Defense, 2020). Further, the research on gender difference for such issues traditionally addressed as part of a treatment plan for a VTC, such as PTSD prevalence among veterans, has been limited (Crum-Cianflone & Jacobson, 2014; Street et al., 2009). Women veterans may face different challenges than their male peers when confronting obstacles within the Florida criminal justice system, and further research is needed to establish these specific needs. With the increasing number of women serving in the military, the issues of these female veterans need further exploration to design appropriate gender-specific services and treatments (if found necessary) for this specific veteran population. This lack of gender diversity was addressed by the respondents in the

current study and reflected in such comments as the need to obtain more female veteran mentors (in response to Question 63).

Finally, as noted earlier, the study design limited the collection of data to those that were not considered a vulnerable population (i.e., the veterans themselves). Instead, I collected data through a qualitative survey to gauge the phenomenon from the point of view of the judges and court administrators from each participating VTC. Future studies are needed to determine if the information gathered is also reflected by the veteran population themselves regarding what role a real or perceived veterans' culture plays in the successful completion of a Florida VTC program.

Implications

Since the early 1990s, several specialized “therapeutic courts” have been developed as part of an effort to address specific populations within the state criminal justice systems (Melton et al., 2007, p. 39). Since their creation, the U.S. government initiated the Global War on Terror following the attacks on the U.S. homeland in September 2001. This precipitated the increasing number of U.S. veterans returning to a civilian society facing major depression, substance abuse problems, PTSD, TBI, and other serious mental health issues (Russell, 2015). In response to the increasing number of military veterans entering the criminal justice system, in 2008 the first specialty problem-solving court specifically intent on mitigating criminal sentences for veterans by considering their experiences by the effects of military service was created in Buffalo, NY (Ahlin & Douds, 2016). Such VTCs are quickly gaining support in various criminal justice jurisdictions in the United States.

One of the underlying concepts for the creation of a VTC, as opposed to other problem-solving courts, is the underlying social contract between the general population and military service veterans that the policy rationale for the creation of a specialty treatment court exclusively for veterans is because their service alone creates a mitigating factor for their criminal infractions and this makes them eligible for entrance into a specialty court program (Timko et al., 2014). In return for voluntary participation in the program and agreeing to complete it, the veterans may receive reduced charges and/or a reduced sentence (Erickson, 2016). These findings indicate that Florida VTCs have a positive social impact, with a 67% graduation rate. The success of such VTC programs in Florida can partially be attributed to this shared *veterans' culture* that has been shown to be a factor as an appropriate method of addressing the needs of those who fall into the criminal justice system due to specific mental health issues that may have developed because of military service. Such VTCs are effective and should be supported and funded as appropriate by the Florida Legislature to continue the positive social change that has begun since their first implementation in the state in 2013.

Conclusions

One aspect of this study was to determine how such VTCs in the state of Florida are implemented, and more specifically, how they were assisted in their execution through the creation of a *veterans' culture*. As has been discussed previously, currently, there are over 300 such VTCs in 35 states (Johnson et al., 2015). It is believed that although VTCs have been growing in establishment, there has been little research concerning outcomes and their implementations (Shannon et al., 2017) or on the

motivating factors that influence why veterans seek treatment in a VTC program (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Baldwin, 2015; Erickson, 2016).

The instant study was specifically designed to highlight the dynamics of VTCs in the state of Florida only, which currently possesses the third largest population of veterans within the country (Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, 2021). The specific recommendations that were highlighted, above, establish that the effectiveness of such a specialized court is based, in part, on addressing the underlining behavioral causes that led to criminal charges and its intersection with the shared experiences of a *veteran culture* (Ahlin & Douds, 2016, p. 93; Frederick, 2014). This research has helped in understanding how Florida's VTCs are implemented through the perceived creation of a *veterans' culture* and the outcomes recorded for military service and involvement within the criminal justice system in Florida.

References

- Ahlin, E. M., & Douds, A. S. (2016). Military socialization: A motivating factor for seeking treatment in a veterans' treatment court. *American Journal of Criminal Justice: AJCJ*, 41(1), 83-96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-015-9332-4>
- Allen, D. F., Carroll, M. A., Allen, V. S., Bethell, K. Y., & Manganello, J. A. (2015). Community resocialization via the installation of family values through a novel group therapy approach: A pilot study. *Journal Of Psychotherapy Integration*, 25(4), 289-298. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039563>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Atmowardoyo, H. (2018). Research methods in TEFL studies: Descriptive research, case study, error analysis, and R & D. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 9(1), 197–204. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0901.25>
- Baldwin, J. M. (2013). *Veterans treatment courts: Studying dissemination, implementation, and impact of treatment-oriented criminal courts* (Order No. 3583509). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Baldwin, J. M. (2015). Investigating the programmatic attack: A national survey of veterans' treatment courts. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 105(3), 705-751.
- Baldwin, J. M., & Brooke, E. J. (2019). Pausing in the wake of rapid adoption: A call to critically examine the veterans' treatment court concept. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 58(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2018.1549181>

- Berman, G., & Feinblatt, J. (2001). Problem-solving courts: A brief primer. *Law & Policy*, 23(2), 125–140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9930.00107>
- Boldt, R. C. (2014). Problem-solving courts and pragmatism. *Maryland Law Review*, 73(4), 1120–1172.
- Brooke, E. J., & Gau, J. M. (2018). Military service and lifetime arrests: Examining the effects of the total military experience on arrests in a sample of prison inmates. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 29(1), 24-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403415619007>
- Canada, K., Barrenger, S., & Ray, B. (2019). Bridging mental health and criminal justice systems: A systematic review of the impact of mental health courts on individuals and communities. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 25(2), 73–91. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000194>
- Castellano, U. (2017). The politics of benchcraft: The role of judges in mental health courts. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 42(2), 398–422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lsi.12266>
- Christensen, C. B. (2020). National identity and veteran culture in a border region: The Danish minority in the German Army during the First World War. *War in History*, 27(1), 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344517750946>
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Crum-Cianflone, N. F., Jacobson, I. (2014). Gender differences of postdeployment post-traumatic stress disorder among service members and veterans of the Iraq and

Afghanistan conflicts. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, 36(1), 5–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxt005>

Comartin, E., Kubiak, S. P., Ray, B., Tillander, E., & Hanna, J. (2015). Short- and long-term outcomes of mental health court participants by psychiatric diagnosis.

Psychiatric Services, 66(9), 923–929. <http://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201400230>

Department of Defense. (2020). *Defense casualty analysis system: Conflict casualties*.

<https://dcas.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/casualties.xhtml>.

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D. & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health* 23, 197–203. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00990785>

Erickson, J. W. (2016). Veterans' treatment courts: A case study of their efficacy for veterans' needs. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 49(part B), 221-225. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2016.10.009>.

Erickson, S. K., Campbell, A., & Lamberti, S. J. (2006). Variations in mental health courts: Challenges, opportunities, and a call for caution. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 42(4), 335–344. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-006-9046-7>

Frederick, A. (2014). Veterans treatment courts: Analysis and recommendations. *Law & Psychology Review*, 38, 211-230.

Florida Courts. (2020). *Veterans courts: Background*. <http://www.flcourts.org/resources-and-services/court-improvement/problem-solving-courts/veterans-court.stml#>

Florida Courts. (2020). *Florida courts*. <https://www.flcourts.org/Florida-Courts>

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. (2020). *Our veterans: Fast facts*.

<http://floridavets.org/our-veterans/profilefast-facts/>

Galdas, P. (2017). Revisiting bias in qualitative research: Reflections on its relationship with funding and impact, 16(1), 1-2. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917748992>

Gill, S. L. (2020). Qualitative sampling methods. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 36(4), 579–581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334420949218>

Greenberg, G. A., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2009). Mental health and other risk factors for jail incarceration among male veterans. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 80(1), 41–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-009-9092-8>

Gummer, T., Blumenberg, M. S., & Roßmann, J. (2019). Learning effects in coders and their implications for managing content analyses. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 22(2), 139–152.

HB 5001, Florida General Appropriations Act. (2020).

https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?FileName=CRA_.pdf&DocumentType=Amendments&BillNumber=5001&Session=2020

Hiday, V. A., Ray, B., & Wales, H. (2016). Longer-term impacts of mental health courts: Recidivism two years after exit. *Psychiatrist Services*, 67(4), 378–83. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201400569>

Johnson, R. S., Stolar, A. G., Wu, E., Coonan, L. A., & Graham, D. P. (2015). An analysis of successful outcomes and associated contributing factors in veterans'

court. *Bulletin Of The Menninger Clinic*, 79(2), 166-173.

<https://doi.org/10.1521/bumc.2015.79.2.166>

Kaiser, K. A., & Holtfreter, K. (2016). An integrated theory of specialized court programs: Using procedural justice and therapeutic jurisprudence to promote offender compliance and rehabilitation. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 43, 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854815609642>

Kaiser, K. A., & Rhodes, K. (2019). A drug court by any other name? An analysis of problem-solving court programs. *Law and Human Behavior*, 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000325>

Kelber, M. S., Liu, X., O’Gallagher, K., Stewart, L. T., Belsher, B. E., Morgan, M. A., Workman, D. E., Skopp, N. A., McGraw, K., & Evatt, D. P. (2021). Women in combat: The effects of combat exposure and gender on the incidence and persistence of posttraumatic stress disorder diagnosis. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 133, 16–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2020.12.010>

Kieckhaefer, J. M., & Luna, S. (2020). Do you think some veterans are receiving a “get out of jail free” card? Examining support for veterans treatment court as a function of mental health and offense type. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 16(1), 141–170. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-019-09395-w>

Kline, A., Callahan, L., Butler, M., St. Hill, L., Losonczy, M., & Smelson, D. (2009). The relationship between military service eras and psychosocial treatment needs among homeless veterans with a co-occurring substance abuse and mental health

disorder. *Journal of Dual Diagnosis*, 5(3/4), 357–374.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15504260903175882>

Lamb, R. H., Weinberger, L. E., & Gross, B. H. (1999). Community treatment of severely mentally ill offenders under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system: A review. *Psychiatric Services* 50(7), 907-913.

Lee, Y. (2013). Military veterans, culpability, and blame. *Criminal Law and Philosophy*, 7(2), 285-307. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11572-013-9207-z>

Lennon, C. (2019). The growth and need for veterans treatment courts. *Touro Law Review*, 35(4), 1171–1194.

Linneberg, M. S. & Korsgaard, S. (2019). Coding qualitative data: A synthesis guiding the novice. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 19(3), 259–270.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-12-2018-0012>

Maguen, S., Madden, E., Lau, K. M., & Seal, K. H. (2013). Service utilization among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans screening positive for traumatic brain injury. *Journal of Neurotrauma*, 30(13), 1123–1128.

<https://doi.org/10.1089/neu.2012.2744> P

Matarazzo, B. B., Farro, S. A., Billera, M., Forster, J. E., Kemp, J. E., & Brenner, L. A. (2017). Connecting veterans at risk for suicide to care through the HOME program. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 47(6), 709–717.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/slbt.12334>

McCormick, W. H., Currier, J. M., Isaak, S. L., Sims, B. M., Slagel, B. A., Carroll, T. D., Hamner, K., & Albright, D. L. (2019). Military culture and post-military

- transitioning among veterans: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 4(2), 288–298. <https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v4i2.121>
- Melton, G. B., Petrla, J., Poythress, N. G., & Slobogin, C. (2007). *Psychological evaluations for the courts: A handbook for mental health professionals and lawyers* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Miles, S. R., Harik, J. M., Hundt, N. E., Mignogna, J., Pastorek, N. J., Thompson, K. E., Freshour, J. S., Yu, H. J., & Cully, J. A. (2017). Delivery of mental health treatment to combat veterans with psychiatric diagnoses and TBI histories. *PLoS ONE*, 12(9), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0184265>
- Miner-Romanoff, K. (2012). Interpretive and critical phenomenological crime studies: A model design. *Qualitative Report*, 17(54), 1-32.
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/miner-romanoff.pdf>
- Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25(9), 1212–1222.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315588501>
- Olson, D. E., Lurigio, A. J., & Albertson, S. (2001). Implementing the key components of specialized drug treatment courts: Practice and policy considerations. *Law & Policy*, 23(2), 171-196.
- Ray, B., Kubiak, S. P., Comartin, E. B., & Tillander, E. (2015). Mental health court outcomes by offense type at admission. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(3), 323–331.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10488-014-0572-2>

- Richards, L., & Morse, J. (2013). *Read me first for a user's guide to qualitative methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Rowen, J. (2020). Worthy of justice: A veterans treatment court in practice. *Law & Policy*, 42(1), 78–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lapo.12142>
- Rozanov, V., & Carli, V. (2012). Suicide among war veterans. *International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health*, 9(7), 2504–2519. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph90725042504>.
- Russell, R. T. (2015). Veterans treatment courts. *Touro Law Review*, 31(3), 385–401.
- Russell, C. A., & Russell, D. W. (2018). It's not just showing up: How social identification with a veterans service organization relates to benefit-finding and social isolation among veterans. *Psychological Services*, 15(2), 154–162. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000176>
- Ryan P., M., Lily F., H., Michael, N., Lewis R., G., & Elizabeth M., N. (2015). Voices of homeless alcoholics who frequent bellevue hospital: A qualitative study. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, (2), 178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annemergmed.2014.05.025>
- Schumm, J. A., & Chard, K. M.. (2012). Alcohol and stress in the military. *Alcohol Research*, 34(4), 401–407.
- Schumm, J. A., Monson, C. M., O'Farrell, T. J., Gustin, N. G., & Chard, K. M. (2015). Couple treatment for alcohol use disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder: Pilot results from U.S. military veterans and their partners. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 28(3), 247.

- Shannon, L. M., Birdwhistell, S., Hulbig, S. K., Jones, A. J., Newell, & J., Payne, C. (2017). Examining implementation and preliminary performance indicators of veterans treatment courts: The Kentucky experience. *Evaluation and Program Planning* 63, 54-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2017.03.003>
- Shari, H. (2017). Self-stigma and veteran culture. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 28(5), 438–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659616676319>
- Slatore, C. G., Falvo, M. J., Nugent, S., & Carlson, K. (2018). Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans: Mental health diagnoses are associated with respiratory disease diagnoses. *Military Medicine*, 183(5/6), e249–e257. <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usx108>
- Smith, B. A. (2016). Juror preference for curative alternative verdicts for veterans with PTSD. *Military Psychology*, 28(3), 174-184. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mil0000115>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. Sage.
- Sreenivasan, S., Garrick, T., McGuire, J., Smee, D. E., Dow, D., & Woehl, D. (2013). Critical concerns in Iraq/Afghanistan war veterans—Forensic interface. Combat-related post-deployment criminal violence. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 41(2), 263–273.
- Sreenivasan, S., Rosenthal, J., Smee, D. E., Wilson, K., & McGuire, J. (2018). Coming home from prison: Adapting military resilience training to enhance successful community reintegration for justice-involved Iraq-Afghanistan

veterans. *Psychological Services* 15(2), 163–71.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000206>.

Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44(1), 26–28

Street, A. E., Vogt, D., & Dutra, L. (2009). A new generation of women veterans: Stressors faced by women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29(8), 685-694. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.08.007>

Tajfel, H. (1972). La categorisation sociale [Social categorization]. In S. Moscovici (Ed.), *Introduction à la psychologie sociale* [Introduction to social psychology] (Vol. 1, pp. 272–302). Larousse.

Teplin, L. A. (1990). The prevalence of severe mental disorders among male urban jail detainees: A comparison with the Epidemiological Catchment Area program. *American Journal of Public Health* 80(6), 663-669. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.80.6.663>

Teplin, L. A., Abram, K. M., & McClelland, G. M. (1996). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among incarcerated women. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 53(6), 505-512. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1996.01830060047007>

Thompson, M., Osher, F., & Tomasini-Joshi, D. (2007). *Improving responses to people with mental illnesses: The essential elements of a mental health court*. Council of State Governments Justice Center. https://www.bja.gov/Publications/MHC_Essential_Elements.pdf

- Timko, C., Midboe, A. M., Maisel, N. C., Blodgett, J. C., Asch, S. M., Rosenthal, J., & Blonigen, D. M. (2014). Treatments for recidivism risk among justice-involved veterans. *Journal Of Offender Rehabilitation, 53*(8), 620-640.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2014.956964>
- Van Dykel, K., & Orrick, E. A. (2016). An examination of the influence of veteran status on offense type among an inmate sample. *American Journal of Criminal Justice 42*(2), 426–442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-016-9373-3>
- Vaughn, P., & Turner, C. (2016). Decoding via coding: Analyzing qualitative text data through thematic coding and survey methodologies. *Journal of Library Administration, 56*(1), 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1105035>
- Wadams, M., & Park, T. (2018). Qualitative research in correctional settings: researcher bias, western ideological influences, and social justice. *Journal Of Forensic Nursing, 14*(2), 72–79. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JFN.0000000000000199>
- Wertz, F. J. (2005). Phenomenological research methods for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 167–177. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.167>
- Wherry, J. L. (2020). Kicked out, kicked again: The discharge review boards' illiberal application of liberal consideration for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. *California Law Review, 108*(5), 1357-1420.
<https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38SNO1496>
- Willis, D. G., Sullivan-Bolyai, S., Knafl, K., & Cohen, M. Z. (2016). Distinguishing features and similarities between descriptive phenomenological and qualitative

description research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 38(9), 1185–1204.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0193945916645499>

Zierk, K. A. (2019). The real antidote: A critical review of U.S. and Canadian drug treatment courts and a call for public health prevention tools as a solution to the opioid epidemic. *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review*, 29(1), 185–217. <https://doi.org/10.18060/7909.0068>

Appendix: Survey Instrument of Selected Florida VTCs

Section 1: Court Composition

1. Do you agree to the terms and conditions of this consent form?
2. What is the name of your Veterans Treatment Court?
3. What Circuit are you located in?
 - Dropbox of all Florida Judicial circuits
4. When was this VTC established?
 - Dropbox of month/year
5. Is this VTC administered at the county or circuit level?
 - Dropbox of county or circuit
6. If administered at the county level, please list all counties that participate under the jurisdiction of this VTC
 - Dropbox of all of Florida's 67 counties
7. How often is this VTC convened?
 - Dropbox of various date choices or "other" with the ability to type the answer
8. How often does this VTC treatment team meet to discuss the participants Outside of court sessions?
 - Dropbox of various date choices or "other" with the ability to type the answer
9. Indicate the characteristics of the judge(s) who currently preside over this VTC?
 - Dropbox of various characteristics of Judge(s) including gender and veteran status
10. Indicate how the court is funded by providing information for relevant options below (check all that apply, and will have the ability to type expanded answer)
 - Works within FY budget established by the state legislature with no additional funding
 - Grant 1 (please specify)
 - Grant 2 (please specify)
 - Grant 3 (please specify)
 - Other local, state, or federal funding
 - Donations
 - Other (please specify)

11. What is the mission/mission statement of your veterans' court? Please attach or write "no mission yet" in the space provided.
12. What services/treatments are offered to participants in your veterans' court? (Generally, as these may be subject to eligibility and availability). Please select all that apply, and note if there is a community provider or VA provider):
 - Mental Health services
 - Substance abuse treatment (detox)
 - Substance abuse treatment (inpatient)
 - Substance abuse treatment (outpatient)
 - Peer mentoring
 - Vocational training/services
 - Other (please specify)
 - Other (please specify)
 - Other (please specify)
13. What other agencies (beyond your own judicial circuit) participate in providing services for your veterans' courts? Please list all in space provided
14. Aside from treatment, what are the benefits for veterans to participate and/or graduate from your veterans' court? Check all that apply:
 - Jail/prison diversion
 - Charges dropped
 - Reduced charges
 - Withhold adjudication
 - Other (please specify)
 - Other (please specify)
 - Other (please specify)

Section 2: Eligibility

15. Are veterans Excluded from participation in the program because of their status? (check all that apply)
 - Individuals with a Bad Conduct Discharge are excluded
 - Individuals with a Dishonorable Discharge are excluded
 - Individuals with a General Discharge under Honorable Conditions is excluded
 - Individuals with an Other Than Honorable Discharge are excluded
 - Individuals with other discharge statuses are excluded (specify below)
 - Individuals who are currently on active duty are excluded
 - Individuals that are not VA healthcare qualified are excluded
16. What types of offenses and/or cases are Excluded from participating in the program? (check all that apply)

- Violent felony (please specify what is excluded or type “all”)
 - Nonviolent felony (please specify what is excluded or type “all”)
 - Traffic violations (please specify what is excluded or type “all”)
 - Drug charges (please specify what is excluded or type “all”)
 - Repeat offenders (please specify what is excluded or type “all”)
 - Other (please specify what is excluded or type “all”)
17. What type of charges may individuals have to be accepted into the veterans' treatment program? Please select all appropriate responses and specify in the space provided if necessary.
- Misdemeanors (specify types if necessary)
 - Felonies (specify types if necessary, such as any restrictions based on violence)
 - Criminal traffic
 - Driving Under the Influence
 - Ordinance violations (specify types if necessary)
 - Other (specify types if necessary)
18. Does this veterans court program accept cases of individuals charged with domestic violence? For example, are individuals with current domestic violence charges allowed to have their cases in veteran's court? Are there certain rules your veterans' court follows when accepting individuals with current or past domestic violence charges?
19. Are there other restrictions that have not been asked relating to what type of cases or veterans status that your veterans' court program does not accept? For example, is a diagnosis for PTSD or other mental illness required? Are only veterans who served in certain conflicts and/or served a tour in combat accepted into the program?

Section 3: Court Process

20. Who performs the initial evaluation of the veterans to determine the services/treatment they need? Please select all appropriate responses and specify where space is provided.
- No one evaluates the veteran
 - Veterans Affairs treatment provider
 - Other VA representative
 - Community treatment provider
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify

21. In the evaluation to determine needed services/treatment, what areas are explored by the evaluator? Please select all that are appropriate.
- Mental health
 - Substance abuse
 - Housing
 - Trauma experience
 - Domestic relations
 - Social support
 - Physical health
 - Employment
 - Education
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
22. Are there certain conditions that veterans must agree to in order for their case to be accepted into this veterans court program? Check all that apply.
- Plead guilty
 - Go on probation
 - Agree to participate in treatment
 - Agree to regular drug/alcohol testing
 - Sign a contract
 - Frequently appear in court
 - Check-in regularly with a member of the veterans' court outside of scheduled treatment
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
23. When are individuals with cases in your veterans' court identified as veterans? Check all that apply.
- At arrest
 - At booking
 - At pretrial
 - At arraignment/first court appearance
 - After arraignment/first court appearance (please specify)
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
24. Who screens individuals to determine whether they are eligible to participate in this veterans treatment court program? Please select all the appropriate responses.
- Jail staff (such as a booking or at center/jail classification)

- Police (such as law enforcement at the time of arrest)
 - Private defense attorney
 - State Attorney
 - Veterans Treatment Court administrator/coordinator
 - Peer mentor
 - Clerk of Court's office
 - VA representative, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
25. What are the requirements for veteran's treatment court graduation/completion? Please select all appropriate responses and specify them in the space provided.
- Complete terms of probation (for those who are placed on probation)
 - Complete court mandates (restitution, fines/fees, get driver's license...etc....)
 - Achieve stable housing situation
 - Complete treatment requirements
 - Treatment evaluations state improvement
 - ALL members of the VTC team (judge, attorneys, VA representative, etc.) agree the veteran has completed all requirements
 - MOST (a majority) of the members of the VTC team (judge, attorneys, VA representative, etc.) agree the veteran has completed all requirements
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
26. Does your veterans' treatment court have a reward/sanction ladder or system of treatment phases the veteran progresses through?
- Yes
 - No
27. Please describe the reward/sanction ladder or system of treatment phases your veteran treatment court uses.
28. What are actions that can result in TERMINATION (removal, not graduation) from your veterans' treatment court program? Please select all the appropriate responses and explain in the space provided.
- Violation of probation
 - Positive drug screen
 - Negative medication screen
 - Non-participation in treatment
 - Failure to appear in court
 - Commission of a new original offense (if so, what is the general nature of the offenses)
 - Other, please specify

- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify

Section 4: Veteran Peer Mentors

29. Does your veteran court utilize veteran peer mentors? Check all that apply
- Yes, the court utilizes veteran peer mentors by the VA
 - Yes, the court utilizes veteran peer mentors that volunteer/work for the court (not employed by the VA)
 - Yes, other types of mentors are used (please specify)
 - No, veteran peer mentors are not used by this court
30. How are veteran peer mentors that work with your court identified?
31. Veteran peer mentors who currently work with the court (not employed by the VA)
- Dropbox of paid vs. volunteer
 - Dropbox of number of veterans peer members working with the court
32. How important is it that veteran peer mentors ____? This is based on a scale of 0-100%. Zero means that you feel there is no importance while 100% means that you feel it is extremely important for veteran peer mentors to have the lived experience. The following question provides a text box into which you can provide any clarification or nuance to further expound on your answer.
- Are they the same gender as the person he/she is mentoring?
 - Are you around the same age as the person he/she is mentoring?
 - Are you from the same branch of service as the person he/she is mentoring?
 - Have the lived experience of justice system involvement (such as a prior arrest and/or jail/prison time)?
 - Have experienced trauma?
 - Have they lived experience of struggling with substance abuse issues themselves?
33. Who matches/assigns mentors to the people they mentor?
34. Any additional information about veteran peer mentors in your court that you feel would be helpful for us to know. For example, what issues with identifying and retaining veteran peer mentors have you experienced? Did your court attempt to start a veteran peer mentor program but found it unfeasible? Any lessons learned from starting a veteran peer mentor program?

Section 5: Types of Court Supervision

35. What veterans treatment court personnel are present during veteran treatment court sessions? Please select all appropriate responses
- Judge (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Veteran offender (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Public Defender (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Private Defense Counsel (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - State Attorney (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Staff from the Veterans Benefits Administration (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - VA Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Veteran peer mentors employed by the VA (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Veteran peer mentors not employed by the VA (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Family members (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Treatment Providers/Counselors (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Court Reporter (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Department of Corrections (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Other, please specify (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Other, please specify (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
 - Other, please specify (check one)
Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never
36. We intend to determine who are the supervising agents for your veterans' court who report on the status and/or progress of individual veterans enrolled in the

treatment program to that court. We are asking you to make a distinction between who is Required to be a supervising agent (can be either a formal or informal supervising agent) as opposed to who serves in this role (can be either a formal or informal supervising agent).

If there is no difference between the Required and Actual supervising agent, then the responses for both columns below should be identical. Please select all appropriate responses.

- | | | |
|--|----------|--------|
| - State Attorney | Required | Actual |
| - Public Defender | Required | Actual |
| - Private Defense Counsel | Required | Actual |
| - VA Veterans Justice Outreach | Required | Actual |
| - Veterans Benefits Administration | Required | Actual |
| - Other VA Representative | Required | Actual |
| - Treatment Providers/Counselors | Required | Actual |
| - Social Worker | Required | Actual |
| - Veteran Peer Mentor Employed by the VA | | |
| | Required | Actual |
| - Veteran Peer Mentor Not Employed by the VA | | |
| | Required | Actual |
| - Other, please specify | Required | Actual |
| - Other, please specify | Required | Actual |
| - Other, please specify | Required | Actual |

37. What means of supervision are utilized by agencies participating in your veterans' treatment court? Please select all appropriate responses.

- Drug screening
- Medication screening/medical level testing
- Housing checks
- Curfew checks
- Employment checks
- Electronic monitoring
- GPS monitoring
- Reporting to an agency regularly
- Verify treatment attendance
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify

Section 6: Veteran Demographics

38. Please indicate the number of people who:

- Have ever had a case in this veterans court (current and past cases). Enter the number of people in the box below (estimate if necessary).

- Have an active case in this veterans court (currently on the docket). Enter the number of people in the box below (estimate if necessary).
 - Have graduated from this veterans court. Enter the number of people in the box below (estimate if necessary).
 - Were eligible for this court but opted to not have their case in veterans court. Enter the number of people in the box below (estimate if necessary).
 - Have had their case accepted into this veterans court, but then later decided to no longer have their case heard in veterans court.
 - Have had their case in veterans court terminated by court staff.
 - Have had more than one case in veterans court (i.e.: have previously graduated from veterans court but then had another charge so they were then accepted back into veterans court).
39. What reasons did veterans provide for not wanting to participate in your veterans' treatment court? Please respond in the space provided. If you do not have this information, please type "Do Not Know."
40. What reasons did veterans provide for dropping out (their choice) of your veterans' treatment court program after agreeing to participate? Please respond in the space provided. If you do not have this information, please type "Do Not Know."
41. For what reasons have veterans been terminated (removed from the program) from your veterans' treatment program? Please select all appropriate responses.
- Violation of probation
 - Positive drug test
 - Negative medication screen
 - Non-participation in treatment
 - Failure to appear in court
 - Commission of a new criminal offense
 - Re-arrest for the same offense
 - Re-arrest for a different offense
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
 - Other, please specify
42. Estimate the percentage of total veterans with cases in your veterans' treatment court that are for (This is based on a scale of 0-100%):
- Male
 - Female
 - White (non-Hispanic)
 - African American
 - Hispanic
 - Asian, Pacific Islander

- 18-20 years old
- 21-25 years of age
- 26-30 years of age
- 31-40 years of age
- 41-50 years of age
- 51-60 years of age
- 61+ years of age

43. Estimate the percentage of veterans with cases in your court that are for (This is based on a scale of 0-100%):

- Active duty (not yet a veteran)
- Those individuals that are in the reserves (not yet a veteran)
- Veterans who served in a post-9/11 conflict (i.e. ONE, OEF, OIF)
- Veterans of Vietnam conflict
- Veterans of the First Gulf War
- Veterans with trauma experience
- Veterans with substance abuse issues
- Veterans who are homeless or at risk of being homeless
- Veterans with mental health issues
- A veteran of the Army
- A veteran of the Navy
- A veteran of the Marines
- A veteran of the Air Force
- A veteran of the Coast Guard
- A veteran of the National Guard

44. Please estimate the percentages of the MALE veterans that have ever participated in your veterans' court with (This is based on a scale of 0-100%):

- Drug offenses
- Traffic offenses (not DUI)
- DUI
- Domestic violence
- Violent offense (not domestic)
- Weapons offense
- Homelessness, unstable housing
- Substance abuse issues
- Mental health issues
- Theft, fraud
- Prostitution
- Family issues
- Anger management, violence issues
- Other (specify)
- Other (specify)

45. For MALE veterans please rank the items they have the hardest time complying with, (1) through (10) with (1) indicating the easiest and (10) representing the hardest:
- Passing drug screens
 - Passing medication screens
 - Attending treatment sessions
 - Obtaining steady housing
 - Abiding by housing facility rules
 - Obtaining legal employment
 - Stop making money illegally
 - Reconciling with family/spouse
 - Controlling anger or violence
 - Following other probation requirements not listed above (please specify)
 - Other (please specify)
 - Other (please specify)
46. Do you have any female veterans participating or have you had any female veterans participate in your veterans' court?
- Yes
 - No
47. Please estimate the percentages of the FEMALE veterans that have ever participated in your veterans' court with (This is based on a scale of 0-100%):
- Drug offenses
 - Traffic offenses (not DUI)
 - DUI
 - Domestic violence
 - Violent offense (not domestic)
 - Weapons offense
 - Homelessness, unstable housing
 - Substance abuse issues
 - Mental health issues
 - Theft, fraud
 - Prostitution
 - Family issues
 - Anger management, violence issues
 - Other (specify)
 - Other (specify)
48. For FEMALE veterans please rank the items they have the hardest time complying with, (1) through (10) with (1) indicating the easiest and (10) representing the hardest:
- Passing drug screens
 - Passing medication screens

- Attending treatment sessions
- Obtaining steady housing
- Abiding by housing facility rules
- Obtaining legal employment
- Stop making money illegally
- Reconciling with family/spouse
- Controlling anger or violence
- Following other probation requirements not listed above (please specify)
- Other (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

Section 7: Veterans Court Dynamics & Outcomes

49. How often do you feel that veterans court team members (i.e., judge, State Attorney, Public Defender, mentors, etc.) (choose one):
- Believe in the same mission: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Cooperate with each other: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Effectively communicate with each other: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Effectively listen to each other: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Deviate from their set roles: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Do not follow procedure: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
50. How often do you feel that the agencies that work with the veterans' treatment court (choose one):
- Believe in the same mission as the veterans' court: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Cooperate with the veterans' court: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Effectively communicate with the veterans' court: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Deviate from their set roles: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Do not follow procedure: Never/Almost
never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
51. How effective do you feel the following things are in your veterans' treatment court (choose one):

- Treatment the veterans receive this court:
Very ineffective/Ineffective/Neither ineffective nor effective/Effective/Very effective
 - Mentoring:
Very ineffective/Ineffective/Neither ineffective nor effective/Effective/Very effective
 - The veterans' court is achieving its mission:
Very ineffective/Ineffective/Neither ineffective nor effective/Effective/Very effective
 - Communications between veterans court team members:
Very ineffective/Ineffective/Neither ineffective nor effective/Effective/Very effective
 - Communications between agencies and veterans court:
Very ineffective/Ineffective/Neither ineffective nor effective/Effective/Very effective
52. How often do you feel that your veterans court (choose one):
- Achieves their mission: Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Positively impacts veterans: Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Negatively impacts veterans: Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Does not impact veterans: Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
53. How often do you feel that the veteran participants (choose one):
- Try to comply with the court mandates:
Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Are grateful for the opportunity given by the veterans' court:
Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Do not want to participate:
Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Think that their problems are related to their service:
Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always
 - Have changed because of program completion:
Never/Almost never/Sometimes/Almost always/Always

Section 8: Outcomes, Opinions, & Other

54. What changes do you see in veteran participants? Please respond in the space provided.

55. What do you think caused these changes? Please respond in the space provided.
56. Generally, do you feel that veteran participants' military service caused the issues that they are now experiencing (mental health, substance abuse, violence, homelessness, etc.)? (choose one):
- Definitely yes
 - Probably yes
 - Maybe
 - Probably not
 - Definitely not
57. Why do you feel the veterans' participants' current issues may or may not be related to their military service? Please respond in the space provided.
58. Generally, do you feel that veteran participants' issues that they are now experiencing (mental health, substance abuse, violence, homelessness, etc.) caused their legal problems (arrest)? (choose one):
- Definitely yes
 - Probably yes
 - Maybe
 - Probably not
 - Definitely not
59. Why do you feel the issues may or may not be related to their arrest? Please respond in the space provided.
60. Generally, do you feel that veteran participants' military service caused the issues that they are now experiencing (mental health, substance abuse, violence, homelessness, etc.), which in turn caused their legal charges? (choose one):
- Definitely yes
 - Probably yes
 - Maybe
 - Probably not
 - Definitely not
61. What do you think is effective (makes a difference in the veteran) in your veterans' court? Please respond in the space provided.
62. What do you think is ineffective (makes a difference in the veteran) in your veterans' court? Please respond in the space provided.
63. If you could change things in your veterans' court, what would you change? Please respond in the space provided.

64. Do you collect, compile or otherwise analyze data to track outcomes (such as re-arrest) for participants in your veterans' court? (choose one):
- No, we do not track outcomes
 - Yes, we do track outcomes
65. Explain how you collect, compile or otherwise analyze data to track outcomes. For example, do you have staff working with the court that collects this data? If so, what staff? Do you proactively collect such data on participants, such as by keeping it in a database? Do you rely on archival data sources, such as arrest and incarceration data? Please respond in the space provided.
66. Do you have any reports of data from this veterans court? Such as a summary of the characteristics of individuals with cases in the court? Of outcomes for individuals with cases in the court? (Choose one):
- Yes
 - No
67. If yes, please include web links for these reports or email these documents to john.capra@waldenu.edu Please respond in the space provided.
68. What challenges do you see the veterans' treatment court team currently facing? Please respond in the space provided.