



Participant Information Sheet (Veterans)

Title of Project: Veteran Connection Programme - Assessing feasibility and acceptability of the Veteran Connection Programme (and trial), designed to enhance mental health amongst military veterans through social connectedness.

Reference Numbers:

Health Research Authority IRAS Project ID: 355035

MODREC Reference ID: 2511/MODREC/26

University of Exeter Research Ethics Reference ID: 5426272

Name of Researcher:

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Invitation and brief summary:

This study aims to understand how service leavers and veterans' identities change after they leave the military. The findings will help us develop the Veteran Connection Programme (VCP). This programme is designed to support veterans' wellbeing and their adjustment to life after service. It does this by focusing on two things: (1) how groups and identities shape people's experiences during life changes, and (2) how strengthening current social networks, and creating new ones, can help people manage change and loss. This research will test the VCP and adapt it for wider use with UK veterans.

You are being invited to take part because your views will help us see whether the programme works as intended, whether it is useful for veterans and service leavers, and whether it needs changes.

Your answers to questions will be de-identified so that they are completely confidential. Any personal details, which may identify you in any way, will not be passed to the

Ministry of Defence (MOD) or the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA). Your answers will not in any way affect any pension, benefits or health services which you are entitled to.

If you choose to participate, you will either be asked to attend a VCP workshop, or you will not be asked to attend a VCP workshop and instead will receive a leaflet listing support services (as well as any healthcare that you would normally receive from healthcare professionals). You will also be given the opportunity to attend a VCP workshop after the research ends.

Purpose of the research:

This research aims to test the Veteran Connection Programme and adapt it for wider use with UK veterans. In order to do this, we are inviting 80 veterans and service leavers to participate in this research. Participants will be randomly selected to join either a group who completes the programme, or a control group who does not complete the programme during the trial. You are being asked to participate in this research because it helps us to test whether the programme is fit for purpose, whether it is useful for veterans and service leavers such as yourself, and whether we should make changes to it.

Why have I been approached?

You have been approached as a former military member who has since left military service. You may have been contacted via your GP or a veterans' charity, or you may have accessed the link to this form via advertisements for this study online or in a public place (e.g., a gym).

What would taking part involve?

For participants who are randomly selected to participate in the programme, taking part in VCP will involve participating in the VCP modules and a small focus group or individual interview, and completion of three online surveys throughout the course of the programme. The modules will be an individual introductory session of around 30 minutes (online), two group sessions of 3.5 hours and 3 hours respectively (face-to-face), and a 60 minute group follow-up session (online). These will include several activities such as group discussions, writing activities, mapping out group connections, and creating an action plan.

The three surveys will take approximately 20 minutes each and will be completed: 1) before the programme begins; 2) at the end of the programme; and 3) three months after the first (baseline) survey, which is approximately two months after the programme has ended.

After completion of the programme, you will be asked if you would like to participate in either a small focus group with other participants, or an individual interview (depending

on your preference). The purpose of this session will be to talk about your feedback on the programme, and more generally discuss the changes you experienced when separating from the Armed Forces. The focus group/interview will take place on a video teleconferencing platform and will take approximately 60-90 minutes. The session will be audio-recorded with the audio being deleted once it has been transcribed and anonymised, so that we can analyse this anonymised data to identify improvements for the Veteran Connection Programme.

For participants who are randomly allocated to the control group, taking part will involve completing three online surveys only. The links to these surveys will be provided on the same timescales as described above. Participants in the control group will not be asked to participate in interviews or focus groups. Participants in the control group will be given the opportunity to attend a VCP workshop after the research ends.

Will I receive any expenses or payments?

Participants who are asked to attend a VCP workshop will receive a £150 payment, while participants who are not asked to attend a VCP workshop will receive a £50 payment. This is because VCP workshop participants will complete all of the survey assessments that non-VCP workshop participants complete, but will additionally be making a significantly larger contribution to the study by engaging in the VCP workshop. Participants who are asked to attend a VCP workshop will also receive travel reimbursement in line with the distance of their travel, and, if needed, accommodation or childcare support.

Are there any direct benefits to me of taking part?

No. There are no direct benefits to you from taking part. The programme is being tested for the first time in this study, so we cannot say what effect it may have. Your participation will help us understand how to support service leavers and veterans in future.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is important to note that this study is not intended to be therapy for psychological trauma. You can still participate in this study if you are currently experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or another mental health condition, as long as you are already receiving help/support from a health professional. If you are not yet receiving help/support from a health professional, we will ask you to postpone participation until relevant professional support via your General Practitioner/doctor or any of the organisations listed below is in place before participating.

Participation in this study should involve no physical or mental discomfort, and no risks beyond those of everyday living. If, however, you should find any question or procedure

to be invasive or offensive, you are free to skip a question or not participate in that aspect of the study.

There are limits to confidentiality. We will need to pass information on, without your consent if necessary, if you tell us something that suggests: a risk of serious harm to you or to another person; a criminal offence that is ongoing or planned; or a concern about the safety of a child or an adult at risk. If you are still serving, a disclosure relating to service discipline may need to be raised with your chain of command or with the study's Independent Medical Officer. In any other case we would contact the relevant civilian authority or safeguarding lead. You will not be asked about any of these things during the study.

If you need crisis support at any stage, please contact one of the following organisations:

- SSAFA - The Armed Forces Charity, www.ssafa.org.uk
- PTSD Resolution, <https://ptsdresolution.org/>, Tel: 0300 302 0551
- Forcesline: 0800 260 6767
- Combat Stress, www.combatstress.org.uk Helpline: 0800 138 1619 (24hr telephone line)
- The Samaritans, www.samaritans.org Tel: 116 123
- NHS Veterans Mental Health support - Op COURAGE www.nhs.uk/opcourage
- Mind, www.mind.org.uk Tel: 0300 123 3393
- The Royal British Legion, www.britishlegion.org.uk Legion Line: 0808 802 8080
- Walking with the Wounded, www.walkingwiththewounded.org.uk
- PTSD UK, www.ptsduk.org
- BLESMA (British Limbless Ex Servicemen's Association), www.blesma.org Tel: 020 8590 1124
- Help for Heroes, www.helpforheroes.org.uk Tel: 0300 303 9888
- Naval Families Federation (NFF), www.nff.org.uk Tel: 02392 654374
- Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, www.rafbf.org Helpline: 0300 102 1919
- Royal Navy Family & People Support (RN FPS) Tel: 0800 145 6088 or 02392 728777

If you are in need of urgent mental health help, here are some options with 24/7 support:

- Samaritans: 116 123
- Emergency services: 999
- Combat Stress: 0800 138 1619 (call) or 07537 173 683 (text)
- Text SHOUT to 85258

- You can also contact our partner organisation PTSD Resolution, <https://ptsdresolution.org/>, Tel: 0300 302 0551

If you disclose that you are struggling with your mental health, the research team will point you to relevant sources of support. If other participants are present, they will be offered the same information.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will not affect you in any way, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, from the signing of the consent form, up until your data have been anonymised. To withdraw from this study, contact the Study Co-ordinator (Dr Summer Bedford; Email:s.l.bedford@exeter.ac.uk, Tel: 07309079536) with your intention to withdraw. You do not need to provide a reason to withdraw from the study. Once your final survey responses have been submitted, it will not be possible to withdraw your data as your individual responses will not be identifiable by the research team in order to remove them. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally identifiable information possible and keep the data secure in line with the University of Exeter's Information and Data Compliance policies.

How will my information be kept confidential?

Your data will be kept completely confidential. Survey, focus group, and interview responses will be collected and stored securely and your personal details will be removed to protect your anonymity. Data will be analysed and reported in such a way that responses cannot be linked to any individual.

Focus groups and interviews will be recorded and then transcribed, removing any personal details. Recordings will be transcribed using the automated caption function in Microsoft Teams, and the transcript will be checked, corrected and anonymised by the postdoctoral researcher on the study team. Recordings and transcripts will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Once transcriptions are completed, the recording will be deleted. All interview or focus group responses you provide will be stored without any identifying information to protect confidentiality. All data will be safely secured using a password-protected system at the University of Exeter. Data will be managed in accordance with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

For participants randomly selected to complete the programme: because VCP is delivered in small groups, confidentiality cannot be absolutely guaranteed between participants. At the start of each workshop, group agreements regarding confidentiality and respectful conduct will be established. Participants will be reminded not to

disclose personal information shared within the group outside the workshop setting. Participants will also be reminded of this at the beginning of any focus groups.

How will we use information about you?

We will need to use information from you for this research project.

This information will include your name, email address and telephone number. People will use this information to do the research or to check your records to make sure that the research is being done properly.

People who do not need to know who you are will not be able to see your name or contact details. Your data will have a code number instead.

The University of Exeter is the sponsor of this research.

The University of Exeter is responsible for looking after your information. We will not share your information related to this research project with any other organisations.

We will keep all information about you safe and secure by:

- storing your contact details separately from your survey, interview and focus group responses, linked only by a code number
- keeping all files on password-protected University of Exeter systems that only the named research team can access
- deleting audio recordings as soon as a transcript has been produced and checked
- removing details that could identify you from all transcripts

International transfers

Your data will not be shared outside the UK.

How will we use information about you after the study ends?

Once we have finished the study, we will keep some of the data so we can check the results. We will write our reports in a way that no-one can work out that you took part in the study.

We will keep your study data for a maximum of 10 years. The study data will then be fully anonymised and securely archived or destroyed. Your contact details will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. Your consent record will be kept for 10 years after the end of the study for audit purposes; it will not be possible to link this to your study data.

What are your choices about how your information is used?

- you can stop being part of the study at any time, without giving a reason, but we will keep information about you that we already have
- you have the right to ask us to access, remove, change or delete data we hold about you for the purposes of the study. You can also object to our processing of your data. We might not always be able to do this if it means we cannot use your data to do the research. If so, we will tell you why we cannot do this
- if you agree to take part in this study, you will have the option to take part in future research using your data saved from this study

Where can you find out more about how your information is used?

You can find out more about how we use your information:

- our leaflet www.hra.nhs.uk/patientdataandresearch
- by asking one of the research team
- **by calling the research team at 07309079536**
- sending an email to s.l.bedford@exeter.ac.uk, or
- by contacting the University of Exeter's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection

What will happen to the results of this study?

Results of this project will be used to develop and improve VCP and will also be used to write manuscripts for publication in academic journals. Any dissemination of quantitative data will only include aggregated statistical summaries and not your individual data. With your permission, we may use quotes from interviews and focus groups, but in a way that cannot link them to any individual. The results may be presented at academic conferences and in public forums. The data may also be included as part of reporting processes for the grant body funding this research. If you would like to learn the outcome of the study in which you are participating, you can contact Dr Summer Bedford (s.l.bedford@exeter.ac.uk) and an abstract of the study and findings will be sent to you.

Who is organising and funding this study?

The research is being conducted by psychologists at the University of Exeter, Nottingham Trent University, and the University of Queensland. The research is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) Programme (Reference: NIHR209840).

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter [Reference Number: 5426272], by the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee (MODREC) [Reference: 2511/MODREC/26], by RAFSAC, and by the NHS Health Research Authority (HRA) [IRAS Project ID: 355035].

Who do I contact if I want to make a complaint?

You can contact our volunteer advocate Will Petty, if you wish to make a complaint or have any issues with the study that you would like to discuss:

Email: W.Petty@exeter.ac.uk

You can also contact our Independent Medical Officer, Jodie Blackadder-Weinstein (Email: Jodie.Blackadder-Weinstein@warwick.ac.uk) if you are experiencing any distress, or the VCP Programme Director Dr Stefan Schilling (s.schilling@exeter.ac.uk) if you have any concerns.

Contact for any questions or requests regarding your participation in this research

In the event of queries or requests you may contact us using the following contact information: s.l.bedford@exeter.ac.uk, s.schilling@exeter.ac.uk, juliet.wakefield@ntu.ac.uk.

To contact the Research Ethics Committee please email psychologyethics@exeter.ac.uk

You can also contact the University Research Ethics and Governance Team if you wish to make a complaint or comment, please email cgr-reg@exeter.ac.uk, or Dr Antony Walsh, Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Compliance, University Corporate Services, University of Exeter, G14, Lafrowda House, St Germans Road, Exeter, EX4 6TJ. DD: 01392 726621, email A.Walsh3@exeter.ac.uk