Focused on the Objective: Experience of Male Combat Veterans in BSN Programs

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of male combat veterans as baccalaureate degree nursing students. The methodology was interpretive phenomenology guided by van Manen’s approach to data collection and analysis. Data collection included written-life-experience descriptions (n=22), photo-elicitation (n=22), and unstructured interviews (N=7). The essential nature of the phenomenon was focused on the Objective and included the themes of goals of the trade, identity, turbulent waters, and fuel. Male combat veterans as nursing students may experience a variety of barriers, frustrations, and emotions but by maximizing their strengths and supports and application of their identity they can remain focused on achievement of their objective to successfully complete nursing school.

Introduction

Research Question
What is the lived experience of being a male combat veteran in a pre-licensure baccalaureate degree nursing program?

Methods
- IRB approval obtained before conducting any portion of the study
- Interpretive phenomenology ( van Manen,1990)
- Setting validity was dependent upon participant location
- Purposive and snowball sampling
- Data collection included three forms of data (Vagle, 2018; van Manen,1990)
  - Written-life-experience descriptions
  - Photo-elicitation
  - Unstructured, audio-recorded interviews through Google hangout
- Data analysis was per van Manen’s methodology
  - Multiple readings, writing and rewriting supported by ATLAS.ti software

Participant Descriptions
- Sample (N=7) included various branches, ranks, regions, and institutions
  - Army (n=4), Air Force (n=2), Marine (n=1)
  - Rank: E4 (n=1), E5 (n=1), E6 (n=1)
  - Age range: 23 to 33
  - Number of deployments ranged from one to four
  - Length of deployment ranged from 3 to 15 months

Themes
Tools of the trade - Describes strengths gained through combat and includes accountability, self-reflection, and time management.

- "Don’t do something you’re not supposed to do..." you have to stay on top of what you’re already learned. (Sam)

Identity - Describes how the veteran viewed himself and includes male vs. female, being honored and taking pride in service, and viewing self as more than a veteran.

- “...it’s like I don’t want this military to be the highlight of my life and that’s all I’ve ever been...” (Sally)

Turbulent waters - Includes the subthemes of rocks (barriers) such as adjusting to a new environment and military personality; rapids (frustrations) such as faulty behavior and self-sabotage; and shoals (snares) such as isolation, self-doubt, and depression.

Fuel - Describes supports that are present and includes hands-on learning and patient interactions experienced in clinical, advancing and progressing in the program, and the structure of nursing school.

- “...walking wide in my day to complete assignments, or wake up early to study before class or for exams, has brought some comfort back to me and my routines...” (Adam)

Discussion and Implications
- Isolation may be present as choice of the veteran
- Peer behaviors excused as due to generational differences
- A gendered issue of role is prevalent in current nursing
- Consistency of teaching and policy application is beneficial
- Offer help before being asked

Conclusion
Male combat veterans may struggle as nursing students with various barriers, frustrations and emotions but can leverage the perspective and strengths gained through combat to remain focused on their objective. Although they view themselves as honorable, they do not wish to receive special or different treatment. Maximizing supports can help them remain focused to be successful in a BSN program.

References

Acknowledgements
Funding support of the National League for Nursing and the Southern Nursing Research Society is gratefully acknowledged.