

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 lived-experience descriptions (n=2), photoelicitation (n=2), and unstructured interviews (N=7). The essential nature of the phenomenon was Focused on the Objective and included the themes of tools 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

With the current nursing shortage, lack of gender diversity in the nursing workforce, and a need for more baccalaureate prepared nurses, nurse educators must creatively recruit future nurses. Veterans may provide a solution to these challenges; however, veterans and male nursing students face challenges such as feeling isolated, lower GPA, and higher rates of attrition. (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; HRSA, 2010; IOM, 2010; MacWilliams, Schmidt, & Bleich, 2013; NLN, 2016; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Teachman, 2007; VA, 2014)

Research Question

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

◆ Data Analysis

 Readings of written Lived-Experience Descriptions Viewing photographs/reading titles and descriptions Coding following interviews

Interview

 Listened to audio Crafted brief summary

Read again in ATLAS.ti while

Reading

Reading Transcripts re-read · Aneodote crafted after rereading transcript Additional coding completed

Selective

Methods

- IRB approval obtained before conducting any portion of the study
- Interpretive phenomenology (van Manen, 1990)
- Setting varied depending upon participant location
- Purposive and snowball sampling
- Data collection included three forms of data (Vagle, 2016; van Manen, 1990)
 - Written lived-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

Essential Nature: Focused on the Objective



Several photographs submitted included a path with a distant object or location. All participants described being focused on the objective as how they were experiencing the phenomenon. Within the phenomenon was a sense of perspective, gained through combat, that allowed them to focus on the objective rather than the stress of being a nursing student.

"...things are out of focus on the sides, but you can kind of see where you're headed like it's a goal at the end.... I think with my experience and everything else in the direction I'm going, I'm getting more clarity with that direction." (John)

"I'm becoming a member of something bigger than myself again." (Jason)

Participant Descriptions

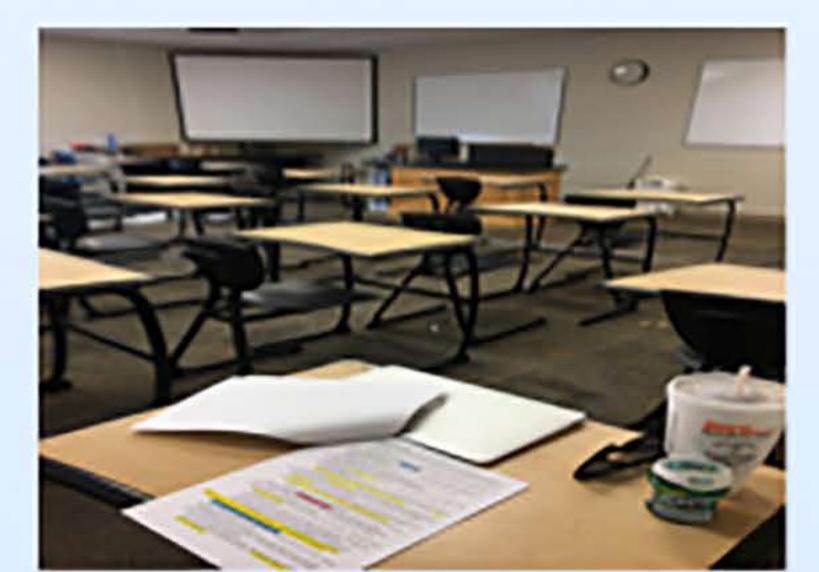
- Sample (N=7) included various branches, ranks, regions, and institutions
 - Army (n=4), Air Force (n=2), Marine (n=1)
 - Ranks of E4 (n=2), E5 (n=4), and E6 (n=1)
 - South (n=3), West (n=2), and Midwest (n=2)
 - Public (n=5) and Private (n=2) universities
 - Ages ranged from 26 to 33
 - Enlistment time ranged from 3 to 12 years
 - Number of deployments ranged from one to 4
 - Deployment length 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've already learnt." (Sam)



Identity- Describes how the veteran views himself and includes male vs. female, being honorable and having 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..."(Andy)



Turbulent waters- Includes the subthemes of rocks (barriers) such as adjusting to a new environment and military personality; rapids (frustrations) such as faculty behaviors, peer behaviors, and stereotype/ stigma; and eddies (emotions) such as feeling isolated, feeling pressure and responsibility, and feeling competitive.



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.

"...setting aside time 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 routine..." (Archer)

Discussion and Implications

- Isolation may be present as choice of the veteran
- Peer behaviors excused as due to generational differences
- A desire to be viewed as more than a veteran is present
- Consistency of teaching and policy application is beneficial
- Offer help before being asked
- More research is needed
- Female veterans
- Faculty perceptions
- Transition to practice

♦ 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.

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