



4-6-2021

Noble Intent Is Not Enough To Run Veterans Court Mentoring Programs: A Qualitative Study of Mentors' Role Orientation and Responsibilities

Anne S. Douds
Gettysburg College

Eilenn M. Ahlin
Pennsylvania State University - Harrisburg

Cassandra Atkin-Plunk
Florida Atlantic University

Michael Posteraro
Pennsylvania State University - Harrisburg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/polfac>



Part of the [Criminology Commons](#), [Legal Studies Commons](#), and the [Military and Veterans Studies Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Recommended Citation

Douds, A. S., Ahlin, E. M., & Posteraro, M. (2021). Noble Intent Is Not Enough To Run Veterans Court Mentoring Programs: A Qualitative Study of Mentors' Role Orientation and Responsibilities. *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology*. <https://doi.org/10.21428/88de04a1.a897747a>

This open access article is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Noble Intent Is Not Enough To Run Veterans Court Mentoring Programs: A Qualitative Study of Mentors' Role Orientation and Responsibilities

Abstract

Mentoring is a key component of veterans treatment courts, a diversionary problem-solving court for justice-involved military veterans. Mentoring programs are unique to veterans' courts; no other problem-solving courts systematically include them as critical components of their court programming. Despite their prominence in veterans courts, little is known about mentor program operations and court expectations for mentors' roles and responsibilities. This study examines mentors' roles and responsibilities as perceived by mentees, mentors, and veterans treatment court staff. Using in-depth interview data from respondents from each of these groups, supplemented by observational data from court hearings and pre-court meetings, we identify three types of mentoring styles: enforcers, sponsor/advocates, and friend. We find a lack of clarity in mentors' roles and responsibilities, which negatively impacted mentor-mentee relationships and mentors' relationships with the court. The three mentoring styles identified in this study offer veterans treatment courts a framework to shape and refine the mentor role and guide future efforts to provide standardized training for mentors.

Keywords

veterans treatment courts, mentoring

Disciplines

Criminology | Legal Studies | Military and Veterans Studies

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology • 2021 | Volume 10, Issue 2

Noble Intent Is Not Enough To Run Veterans Court Mentoring Programs: A Qualitative Study of Mentors' Role Orientation and Responsibilities

**Anne S. Douds¹, Eileen M. Ahlin², Cassandra Atkins-Plunk³,
Michael Posteraro²**

¹Gettysburg College, ²Penn State Harrisburg, ³Florida Atlantic University

Published on: Apr 06, 2021

License: [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

ABSTRACT

Mentoring is a key component of veterans treatment courts, a diversionary problem-solving court for justice-involved military veterans. Mentoring programs are unique to veterans' courts; no other problem-solving courts systematically include them as critical components of their court programming. Despite their prominence in veterans courts, little is known about mentor program operations and court expectations for mentors' roles and responsibilities. This study examines mentors' roles and responsibilities as perceived by mentees, mentors, and veterans treatment court staff. Using in-depth interview data from respondents from each of these groups, supplemented by observational data from court hearings and pre-court meetings, we identify three types of mentoring styles: enforcers, sponsor/advocates, and friend. We find a lack of clarity in mentors' roles and responsibilities, which negatively impacted mentor-mentee relationships and mentors' relationships with the court. The three mentoring styles identified in this study offer veterans treatment courts a framework to shape and refine the mentor role and guide future efforts to provide standardized training for mentors.

Introduction

Building upon drug courts' legacies and other problem-solving courts, veterans treatment courts (VTCs) provide an alternative to traditional criminal processing for justice-involved veterans. VTCs adopt a non-adversarial approach and incorporate many elements of problem-solving courts, such as periodic judicial contact, interdisciplinary partnerships with community stakeholders, and therapeutic programming. Unlike other problem-solving courts, however, many VTCs include mentoring programs in which veterans from the community support VTC participants.

The utility and applicability of mentoring have transcended time and discipline, and it has enjoyed a resurgence of attention in recent years in military and criminal justice contexts (Bauldry et al., 2009; Buck, 2018; Singh, Cale, & Armstrong, 2019). As part of this resurgence, the first sustained VTC began in Buffalo, New York in 2008 included a mandatory mentoring program designed to replicate, or at least reflect, military culture and the warrior ethos of "leave no one behind." Judge Robert Russell, a veteran of both the military and the courtroom, had observed marked changes in justice-involved veterans' demeanor after they had opportunities to interact with criminal justice professionals who were also veterans. Thereafter, Judge Russell concluded that "peer mentors would be an essential addition to the Treatment Court

Team” (Buffalo Veteran’s Court, 2009, p. 7). While mentoring has various definitions, it can be understood broadly as a meaningful relationship in which a more experienced individual guides, tutors, educates, and helps a protégé (Allen & Eby, 2007; Cohen, 2003; Farley & Hackman, 2006; Klinge, 2015; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

Many early and high-profile mentor programs targeted youth, such as the Big Brothers Big Sisters programs (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Since the implementation of the Buffalo VTC, approximately 65% of the more than 500 VTCs in the United States have integrated a mentoring program into their operations (Timko et al., 2016). Some courtroom workgroup communities perceive mentoring to be an essential part of the VTC experience. Mentoring is one of the 10 Key Components of a popular VTC model (Justice for Vets, 2020). Indeed, Key Component #4 states that “[mentors’] active, supportive relationship, maintained throughout treatment, increases the likelihood that a veteran will remain in treatment and improves the chances for sobriety and law-abiding behavior” (Justice for Vets, 2017, p. 2).

Mentoring among veterans very well may be a critical component of the VTC experience, but until recently, there was only anecdotal evidence of how VTC mentoring programs operate. Recent scholarship suggests that VTC mentoring programs are popular and positively influence veteran mentees (Druzin, 2015; Jalain & Grossi, 2020; Moore, 2012). However, there is little data on how mentors perceive their place in the VTC experience (but see Jalain & Grossi, 2020; Lucas, 2018). There is no consistency in the literature or the law about how mentors are supposed to act or what they should do as they fulfill the purportedly critical role of mentoring veteran offenders. Important questions need to be explored. What are VTC mentoring programs intended to accomplish? And how do they define mentors’ and mentees’ roles and responsibilities in the complex criminal justice environment that promotes competing goals of justice, rehabilitation, and punishment?

This qualitative study uses interviews and observations built upon a phenomenological analytic framework to explore how three categories of VTC participants perceive, interpret, and interact with the VTC mentoring program (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2007). We explore these questions in one northeastern VTC mentoring program to lay the foundation for a more thorough empirical analysis of VTC mentoring programs. To frame this discussion, we first review the literature on mentoring within military and criminal justice contexts. This literature review underscores the broad importance of mentoring absent substantive literature on VTC mentoring programs. We then move through the limited data on mentoring in VTCs and provide original data triangulated

from three main sources: (1) interviews with 30 VTC mentors and mentees; (2) interviews with VTC personnel; and (3) review of all manuals, training materials, regulations, laws, and guidelines applicable to this VTC. Finally, we provide implications for practice and conclude with recommendations for future research on VTC mentor programs.

Literature review

Mentoring in the military

The military thrives on formal and informal mentor-mentee relationships to sustain its culture, convey knowledge and expectations, promote cohesion, and ameliorate some of the adverse consequences of a profession that requires separation from other meaningful relationships (Carter et al., 2016; Johnson & Andersen, 2010; Steinberg & Nourizadeh, 2001). Military mentorships do more than promote career advancement. They serve as surrogate support systems, sounding boards, and cultural education more so than civilian, private sector mentorships. Military academies consistently use formal mentoring programs with great success to promote academic achievement and longer-term intellectual allegiances among faculty and students (Smith & Rosenstein, 2017). Many military units require younger or less experienced personnel to engage in formal mentor relationships with service members from higher ranks or great academic or technical expertise. Formal mentorships often are mandatory. At the same time, informal mentoring relationships are quite common and encouraged in the military. By their nature, military units support the development of relationships predicated on the transfer of knowledge and mutual support, trust, and respect.

There are benefits and drawbacks to each form of mentoring in the military. Military personnel engaged in formal and semiformal mentoring relationships receive more career-oriented and psychosocial counseling than those in informal mentoring relationships (McGuire, 2007). On the other hand, some mentees find that mandatory mentorships impose onerous requirements such as excessive paperwork and “checklists” (Johnson & Andersen, 2010). Informal mentor relationships have fewer official obligations and serve as stress-free options for both the mentee and mentor. Kimball (2015) suggests that informal mentoring is preferred in the military because it is voluntary and mutually beneficial to both parties involved. Mandatory mentoring can feel like an extra duty; in contrast, informal mentoring reflects “a connection between two professionals that builds the capacity of both” (Kimball, 2015, p. 2). Research establishes objective benefits of mentoring in the military. Soldiers with a mentor showed earlier promotions, higher SAT scores, stronger career commitment, and lower

stress levels (Carter et al., 2016; Saperstein, Viera, & Firnhaber, 2012). Additionally, mentored soldiers showed more incentive to become mentors later and continue supporting their less experienced comrades (Rieckhoff, Schleifer, & McCarthy, 2012).

Mentoring among veterans

Once service members separate from the military, they must navigate the process of becoming a civilian while retaining the military patina that has made them feel distinct or separate from civilian society during their time of service. Some veterans seamlessly transition into their new roles post-active duty. Research suggests that successful reintegration comes most naturally to those who served as commissioned officers, had college degrees, felt that they understood the mission they were pursuing during their time of service, and reported higher religiosity levels (Morin, 2011). But others, particularly those who endured trauma, suffered an injury, experienced post-traumatic stress (PTS) or other mental health challenges, or knew someone who was killed or served in combat experience debilitating alienation and related difficulties with reintegration (Morin, 2011). Particularly among these latter groups, community-based peer support systems seem to smooth some of the bumps in the road to reintegration (Brown et al., 2016). According to Money and colleagues (2011, p. 4),

due to the stressful nature of the work of service members, particularly those who have seen combat, the military has created a culture in which service members take care of each other. This mentality easily lends itself to an environment where service members rely on the natural support of their colleagues to cope with stress.

Peer support programs and their services result in benefits to recipients, providers, and the health care system. These benefits include empowerment, improved self-esteem, improved social functioning of both provider and recipient, decreased social isolation, increased feelings of acceptance, increased hope, reduced stigma of the recipient, and sustained readmission rates and recovery as well as or better than professional services (Repper & Carter, 2011; Solomon, 2004). As veterans seek mental health care, peer support “leverages shared experience to foster trust, decrease stigma and create a sustainable forum for seeking help and sharing information about support resources” (Money et al., 2011, p. 4). In turn, mentor endorsement may reduce the stigma associated with seeking care due to greater credibility of peers over non-peers, which reduces stigma related to mental health-seeking behavior (Money et al., 2011).

Mentoring in criminal justice settings

While mentoring programs within criminal justice settings have less breadth than military-based mentoring, the popularity of mentoring programs for justice-involved individuals has dramatically increased (Buck, 2018; Hucklesby & Wincup, 2014; Singh et al., 2019). They are being touted as the “intervention of the moment in criminal justice” (Hucklesby & Wincup, 2014, p. 14). These programs seek to reduce recidivism, promote desistance, and improve positive life outcomes through the connection of at-risk individuals with positive role models. Mentors can be paid or volunteers, people with lived experiences similar to the mentees (known as peer mentors), or simply those seeking to give back to their community. Mentoring has been incorporated at all stages of the criminal justice process, including pretrial (Hucklesby, 2011), within community and institutional corrections (Buck, 2018; Farley & Hackman, 2006), and during the reentry and reintegration process (Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019). Additionally, mentoring programs target various justice-involved populations beyond adult males, including youth (Newburn & Shiner, 2006), women (Singh et al., 2019), and veterans (Schaffer, 2016).

The tangible benefits produced by forging mentor-mentee relationships in military and veteran settings are also evident among individuals in the criminal justice system. Indeed, numerous studies have documented the positive effects of justice-based mentoring programs on both subjective and objective life outcomes. Specifically, such programs have been successful at reducing recidivism (Farley & Hackman, 2006) and self-harm (Griffiths & Bailey, 2015), decreasing substance use, and encouraging recovery (Rowe et al., 2007). They also increase mentees' ability to secure and maintain employment (Farley & Hackman, 2006), locate and obtain housing (Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019), enhance their social capital (Singh et al., 2019), and improve physical and mental health-related outcomes (Bagnall et al., 2015).

The Ready4Work program, for example, is a reentry-based mentoring program for individuals who are incarcerated and who have less than 90 days before the end of their sentences (Farley & Hackman, 2006). In this program, the mentor's main role was to support mentees during the reentry process in areas such as setting post-release goals, finding employment and housing, and demonstrating how to prepare a monthly budget (Bauldry et al., 2009; Fletcher & Sherk, 2009). Mentees who stayed in the *Ready4Work* program three months or longer were twice as likely to secure employment and more likely to remain employed for three months. They also

experienced lower recidivism and were 35% less likely to return to prison within a year of release (Farley & Hackman, 2006).

In addition to the established but limited evidence pointing to their effectiveness, other researchers have begun to explore the conditions that result in effective mentoring programs. Buck (2018), for example, suggests that three core conditions of peer mentoring exist: caring, listening, and setting manageable goals. Additionally, results from a national survey of at-risk or justice-involved youth mentoring programs found that three program elements predicted youth goal attainment: increased frequency of meetings between mentors and mentees, increased duration of mentoring relationships, and formal and continued training of mentors (Miller et al., 2013). Some government officials and policymakers have heralded justice-based mentoring programs as essential to the effective rehabilitation of individuals involved in the criminal justice system (Newburn & Shiner, 2006). Others are not as optimistic and question their place within the criminal justice system citing mentoring programs as a promising approach, at best (Hucklesby & Wincup, 2014).

Mentoring among justice-involved veterans

Despite several recent studies examining mentoring programs within criminal justice settings (Hanham & Tracey, 2017; Nixon, 2020; Singh et al., 2019), there is a dearth of information surrounding the structure, operation, and effectiveness of mentoring programs for justice-involved veterans. The limited research that does exist suggests that mentoring programs among incarcerated veterans provide similar support services and demonstrate reductions in recidivism post-release while embracing veteran culture (Schaffer, 2016). Justice-involved veteran participants also endorse these programs. A mentoring program delivered as part of a larger veteran-centric housing unit in the San Diego County Jail, for example, was highly rated, with 64% of participants deeming it to be a useful addition to traditional treatment offerings provided during jail stays (Burke et al., 2019). The success of mentoring in various domains, including the military and criminal justice system, and specific subgroups (e.g., veterans, women), suggests that mentoring is a natural fit for VTCs. VTC mentoring programs exist in many states, but like the courts themselves, mentoring programs have developed on an ad hoc basis with little to no evidence-based guidance (Arno, 2014).

While VTC process and outcome evaluations are beginning to demonstrate their success, albeit with mixed results (Hartley & Baldwin, 2019; Holbrook & Anderson, 2011; McCall et al., 2018), a search of the literature revealed a paucity of evaluations

of the mentoring component within VTCs. Indeed, scholarly research is just beginning to describe the structure of mentoring programs (Jalain & Grossi, 2020) and mentors' experiences and expectations within VTCs (Lucas, 2018). In a study exploring VTC mentors' role in three VTCs in two Midwestern states, Jalain and Grossi (2020) found a lack of standardization in mentoring policies and practices, lack of consistency in training, and variations in how mentors defined their role. Even though this resulted in confusion as to the true function of the mentor and their responsibility, the authors noted the dedication of the mentors and their goal of helping the veteran succeed. Similarly, Lucas (2018) noted that mentor experiences did not align with their initial expectations, particularly with regard to feeling disconnected from the VTC team, and that inadequate training led to mentors approaching their roles and responsibilities in varying manners.

These studies contribute to our understanding of VTC mentor programs, how they are implemented in different jurisdictions, and what evaluative research needs to be done to determine their effectiveness. However, what is lacking is a full understanding of VTC mentors' expected roles and responsibilities in their contribution to this court, not only through mentors' eyes but also from the perspective of mentees and court staff. In civilian mentor programs, those not affiliated with the criminal justice system or the military, mentors' and mentees' roles are defined vis-à-vis one another, with the mentor modeling professional behavior and advising mentees on topics such as best practices, career success, cultural acclimation, or professional mores (Hill & Wheat, 2017; Izadinia, 2015; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2017). Generally, mentors serve as role models, and they understand their role to be to promote mentees' professional or personal success. That role orientation does not graft cleanly onto criminal justice settings, and it is even less neatly applied to VTCs. Mentors in VTCs are not modeling professional behavior. They are fulfilling myriad roles, but none of them is to shepherd mentees through promotion and career development pathways. Thus, the literature on roles and responsibilities in mentoring programs in traditional, private sector settings is not highly relevant to this population. Literature on the roles and responsibilities of veteran mentors remain obscure.

Current study

This study builds upon a pilot survey of mentor programs in Pennsylvania VTCs, which two of the authors of the present study conducted (Douuds et al., 2017). The pilot survey shed light on the administration of mentor programs and demonstrated the current research need. Specifically, the authors found that mentors had a host of

duties. They include, but are not limited to, providing support for the veteran/participant (mentee); being present in court; ensuring mentee participation in programs such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and reporting to the court on the mentees' successes and setbacks. Notably, however, there was no legal duty of confidentiality on the mentor's part, and the relationships among the mentors and veterans were ill-defined. These blurred roles and responsibilities of VTC mentors may present problems as these programs expand across the nation. Thus, mentors' contributions and significance to the VTC process require further study, as it is unclear if VTC mentoring adheres to the relaxed structure of non-justice-based mentoring programs.

While a limited body of literature has emerged that explores VTC mentoring through the eyes of the mentors themselves (Jalain & Grossi, 2020; Lucas, 2018), this study adds to this important work by examining how mentors, mentees, and VTC staff perceive the roles and responsibilities of mentors. As such, this qualitative study set out with the aim of (1) describing perceptions of how mentoring fits within the VTC arena; (2) describing what mentoring within the context of a VTC entails; and (3) discerning whether there is a consensus understanding of mentors' roles and responsibilities. Based on our pilot study and prior research, we hypothesized that the VTC mentoring program in practice might be something different from what is typically conceived of as a mentoring program.

Methods

To explore VTC stakeholders' perspectives on the mentoring program, we contacted the VTC with whom we had completed the pilot study (Douds et al., 2017) that initially gave rise to our perception that there are inconsistencies in role-orientation among VTC mentors. We arranged to conduct interviews in what court personnel call "the Lawyers Lounge," a ballroom-sized room in the courthouse regularly used by attorneys to meet with other attorneys and with clients before court. On Fridays, VTC mentors and mentees gathered for what they described as "fellowship" in the Lounge before formal court sessions. The Lounge is equipped with white noise machines and segregated spaces (some oriented around fireplaces) for small-group meetings. The spaces are not entirely private, but they apparently are sufficient for attorney-client conversations. Therefore, we felt they were sufficient for interviews with mentors and mentees.

Moreover, we chose this space because mentors and mentees regularly met in this space, because they were already comfortable in this space, and because they

perceived it as “theirs.” We could have chosen more clinical, and perhaps more confidential, spaces, but we felt that the Lounge provided space where respondents would feel safe, which would mitigate any perceived power imbalance between interviewees and interviewers (Knox & Burkard, 2009). With that said, and as discussed below, our findings must be interpreted with the knowledge that there is the possibility that interviewees perceived that other people might be able to eavesdrop on their interviews.

At the outset, we met with all mentors and mentees as a group to explain the purpose of the research, and then we invited them to sign up for interviews. We scheduled interviews with mentors in the Lounge on days they were available; on some of those days, other mentors and mentees were present in other spaces in the Lounge. All interviews with mentors were one-on-one. Some mentors preferred to meet in private; others chose to meet in proximity to other mentors. The few mentors who preferred to meet where others could see and hear them seemed to be a slight performative aspect to their interviews, which may have impacted their responses. However, their responses were consistent with other information gleaned from private interviews through subsequent participant validation efforts. Nevertheless, readers should interpret our data with this potential limitation in mind. Data on VTC team members' perceptions of the mentoring program were gleaned from semi-structured interviews held with individual team members.

We held interviews with mentees only on days when mentors were not present in the Lounge. Most of the interviews with mentees were one-on-one in segregated spaces. However, some mentees asked if they could meet with us in pairs; they said they felt more comfortable having another veteran present. On one occasion, while we were interviewing two mentees in an otherwise empty Lounge, several other mentees unexpectedly entered the Lounge. They situated themselves in another space. However, after several minutes, the newly arrived mentees navigated their way towards us, wheeling their chairs across the room towards our space. One of the newly arrived mentees, who apparently had positioned himself quite close to our space, interjected a comment in response to one of our interview questions. It became apparent that they were listening to us and wanted to join our session. To avoid being rude and because of the mentees' familial atmosphere, we invited them to join our session. The formal interview devolved into a convivial, small-group conversation. Although it was not the format we intended, it turned out to be one of the most robust and insightful conversations we had with mentees. They seemed to feel invigorated by

having their group together, and they fed off of one another. In other words, that interview turned into what could be described as a focus group session.

We developed the interview guides following our pilot study, during which we observed a concerning phenomenon of role confusion among mentors and mentees. Thus, we wanted to explore how mentors, mentees, and VTC team members experience the mentoring program and their role in that program. We designed open-ended questions to plumb interviewees' perceptions of the program and their interpretations of others' behaviors within the program (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Pogrebin, 2003). In other words, the interview guides sought information from a variety of perspectives to understand the mentoring program as an organic experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). All interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guides that included predetermined categories of questions grounded in theories developed during the pilot study. Specifically, the interview guides opened with brief welcome statements, introductions, and questions about the interviewees' connection with the court. Then the questions moved into (1) how would you describe the mentoring program in this court; (2) how would you describe your role in the mentoring program; (3) how would you describe [mentees/mentors/court personnel] role in the mentoring program; (4) what have been some of the strengths of the mentoring program, from your perspective; (5) what are some of the weakness of the mentoring program, from your perspective; and (6) if you were put in charge of the program, and money were no object, what, if anything, would you do to change the program?" Surprisingly, the last question did not elicit much response. Interviewees instead took the question as an opportunity to return to a discussion of the program's strengths and weaknesses.

The interviewers conducted the first round of interviews in teams, with one researcher asking questions and the other taking notes. During the second round of interviews, one researcher conducted the interviews and transcribed the recorded conversations, and another researcher independently reviewed the transcripts. At least two researchers participated directly or indirectly in each interview, and the researcher-pair interpreted the data separately before comparing findings with one. Using this method allowed each researcher to interpret data independently and validate one another's findings (Bryman, 2004). In this way, the research team employed both data and interviewer triangulation to increase their findings' reliability (Bazeley, 2013; Wilson, 2014).

We interviewed 15 mentors and 15 mentees from one VTC, representing at least two-thirds of the mentors in this VTC program. The research team ceased interviewing

once data saturation was achieved as evidenced by redundancy in themes and no new information emerged after several consecutive interviews (Guest et al., 2006). We also conducted interviews with the VTC team members (e.g., judge, defense counsel, program coordinator, probation). In total, we completed over 70 hours of interviews, each lasting 1 to 2 hours between August through October 2017. As noted above, one interviewer conducted the interviews while another researcher took handwritten notes, transcribing verbatim quotations to the fullest extent possible. Interviews with VTC team members often took place in the courtroom or chambers, where no recording devices were permitted. All interviewees were asked the same questions, but the interviewers allowed the conversations to flow naturally, which allowed for more comfortable experiences for the interviewees and richer data collection (Dibley, 2011). To test the data's validity as we collected it, we periodically recited findings to interviewees to gauge their assessment of how reliable other interviewees' responses had been. For example, after asking about the program's strengths, we would follow with, "some other folks have told us that the culture of camaraderie is one of the things they like best about the mentoring program. Has that been your experience?" We encourage future studies to be explicit in their efforts to assess participant validation (Birt et al., 2016). Likewise, we did some negative case analyses as described in our findings, but we could have more deliberately reviewed and incorporated negative cases in the study by seeking out additional input from respondents. The researchers also observed 12 mentor-mentee pre-court meetings and VTC sessions to gather process data on the mentoring program's context from the VTC team's perspective and supplement interview data to provide context for the findings. Researchers sat in the back of the courtroom where they could hear all exchanges and observe participants' behavior. They took handwritten notes that they later typed and exchanged with one another.

The authors employed open, axial, and selective coding techniques to identify themes across interviews and observations (Charmaz, 2014). First, each researcher undertook open coding by reading through the mostly verbatim notes from each interview and the notes from all observations independently and multiple times (Cascio et al., 2019). They each made lists of words and phrases that either literally recurred in the data or were implicated by the data. For example, not all interviewees used the word "duty" explicitly. Still, most interviewees used language that implied they felt a duty to help other veterans (mentors and VTC team members) or a duty to rehabilitate themselves (mentees). Then the researchers compared lists and arrived at a consensus on a list of themes presented in the data.

Next, the researchers discussed what relationships might exist among the themes and commenced axial coding (Williams & Moser, 2019). Using deductive and inductive analysis, they queried the data for evidence that something was amiss with role orientation, as they initially hypothesized. Simultaneously, they sought to understand the identified themes in terms of how mentors, mentees, and VTC team members understand their relationships with one another and with the mentoring program. Returning repeatedly to the notes, they categorized the themes derived from open coding into various sets. Ultimately, the researchers landed upon three main themes: mentoring as an obligation; mentoring role orientation; and mentor responsibilities, as discussed below. The appropriate Institutional Review Board approved all methods.

Findings

We begin by addressing the recurrent theme in the data, which was a sense amongst interviewees that the VTC mentor program was part and parcel to the VTC, an obligation to veterans. We then turn to the two broad themes, mentor roles and mentor responsibilities, that emerged from the data to describe mentoring in a VTC.

Mentoring as obligation

Research suggests VTCs are premised on veteran culture and are an extension of the social support and “leave no one behind” mentality evidenced in the military (Ahlin & Douds, 2016). This study, in part, probed veterans’ purposes and motivations for serving as VTC mentors. The main theme espoused by mentors was a sense of obligation to help justice-involved veterans. Jim (all names are pseudonyms), a mentor, stated, “... they devoted some of their years to defending their country, so they deserve a little bit more than the high school kid who just did drugs his whole life and didn’t serve God and country.” The “more” in this case was the VTC. Additional consideration was deemed necessary for justice-involved persons if they had the added identity of military veteran.

More to the point of mentoring, Jake, another mentor summed it up more verbosely but equally as poignantly:

This court’s being run by vets for vets. [It] tries to capitalize on that positive experience [in the military] and tries to help the [vets]. Veterans helping veterans. Shared history. [It is a] life experience [that] is similar for a private and a colonel ... [and they] have that common background and stories to share. [There is] an ethic instilled in all veterans to leave no one behind. [To] help one another. Give a guy a hand up. Military culture continues [and is] lifelong. Psychologists talked to

World War Two vets who said their service years were some of the best of their lives; the band of brothers. [There is] something special about being in the military.

After an effusive elaboration of his thoughts on the reasons for mentoring in the VTC, Jake paused to check his emotions, looked hard at the interviewer, and simply said, “that’s why.” The conversation focused on veteran mentors helping participant veterans even though the judge on the bench of this court and a member of the VTC team were veterans.

Another frequent maxim among the mentors was that of a “blank-check.” One of the older mentors in the program, Bob, summarized the collective sentiment best when he said “when these men and women joined the military, they wrote a blank check to the nation. They said, whatever you need, we will do it. This [mentoring] is our way of paying them back.” Bob went on to explain, while several other mentors were listening as they sat at a nearby table nodding in agreement, “These guys may have screwed up, but they are not screw-ups.” Jim, who gave a separate interview and seemingly was unaware of the older mentor’s comments, said,

Veterans signed a blank check that says, if you need me, call me, and I will lay down my life for you. Plus, [older mentors] who served in Vietnam, Grenada, OIF, OEF, and saw people killed, they can understand what the [mentees] lived through.

These sentiments were supportive and benevolently paternalistic. There was a certain degree of protective affect among the mentors. They created the impression that they were more knowledgeable than the mentees, knew what was best for the mentees, and that the mentees would be glad they participated in the VTC. There was a slightly cultish quality, which for some was reminiscent of military culture, bravado, and reverence for authority. As Marshall, a mentee, said, “They [the mentors] have all drunk the Kool-Aid.”

VTC team members unanimously echoed this sense of duty. They were very proud of a documentary produced by a local news outlet that described them as a place where “no one gets left behind.” A tone of duty and service to the veterans permeated all VTC team meetings, and there was none of the cynicism or dark humor that often arise in other criminal justice settings. They were all “true believers” in the VTC mission, as one VTC team member explained.

While mentors uniformly agree on the value of mentoring and the larger VTC program, mentors perceived that mentees were more mixed in their reactions to the program.

Most felt that mentees did not “take to” the VTC program right away and needed time to adjust to VTC requirements and programming. From the mentor perspective, Alan, a mentor who had been with the court since its inception, said that “the younger [mentees] had lots of attitude coming in. Within a couple of months, they were reborn with a totally different attitude. After they got in and talked with others, [they] realized this was a good deal.” VTC team members, particularly those involved with compliance monitoring, concurred with this assessment when asked.

Mentor roles

VTC team members, mentors, and mentees all had a consistent understanding of the VTC mission, and a sense of why mentoring in this context was appropriate. All people interviewed (mentors, mentees, and VTC team members) spoke the same language, literally and metaphorically, about how veteran mentoring added value to the VTC experience, often harkening to their developmental roots steeped in rich military culture. VTC team members also had a fairly clear understanding of what they expected from mentors. They explicitly did not want mentors to be advocates, and they reported that they historically had rejected mentors' requests to be included in team meetings. The judge was very clear that mentors were supposed to report on contacts with mentees and provide “support,” but that they were not to make recommendations to the court, behave as attorneys, or serve as advocates with respect to anything related to VTC oversight or decision-making. They were much more descriptive in what they did *not* want mentors to do than in what they wanted them to do. At the time of the study, the VTC did not have a concrete definition for mentors' roles or a well-established means of communicating with mentors. They relied upon Alan, a senior mentor quoted above, to serve as a volunteer “mentor coordinator,” a liaison to the other mentors. Alan enjoyed extensive autonomy in his position. He took his role very seriously and was “proud of the program [he] built.” Notably, since this study ended, they have made the mentor coordinator a paid position with more regular contacts with the VTC team.

While the VTC had decided opinions on mentors' roles, the mentors themselves and the mentees were far less clear on what they were supposed to do in the mentoring program. Mentors and mentees agreed that mentors should serve as role models. But there was no consensus beyond that sentiment on what being a role model means or how to describe their primary role in the VTC program. Three themes emerged concerning mentors' role orientation through the open and axial coding of interviews

and observational data. Mentors appear to be self-oriented to one of three roles: enforcer, sponsor/advocate, and friend.

Mentor as enforcer

Mentors who embraced an enforcer role perceived themselves to be an extension of the court and/or the probation office. They believed it was their duty to make sure that their mentees followed the prescriptive rules and requirements of the VTC program. According to one mentor, David, they are the “eyes and ears of the court where it can’t go.”

Mentors in this group distinctly explained that they were not the mentees’ friends. Mentors who viewed themselves as enforcers compared themselves to a senior military officer or inspector general, with the mentee fulfilling the role of a junior officer or an enlisted person. This simulated rank structure emerged as important among this subgroup of mentors, and they emphasized the importance of mentees respecting them “like a superior.” Clark, an enforcer mentor, recalled that the:

Judge often refers to mentors as being officers ... even the DA is impressed that I am a lieutenant colonel. Once the DA figured out that I outranked him, it made a big difference. They all want to salute when I walk in the courtroom. ... They give a lot of respect to you if you are an officer. Also give a lot of respect to decorated veterans, even if enlisted.

Joe, a mentee, echoed this perspective and found that it applied within the mentee cohort, as well. Mentees deferred to the court’s hierarchical structure, endorsing the idea that, with higher rank comes respect and a duty to enforce the rules, suggesting a strong connection between position and role.

The mentees created their own social structure. Sometimes, to start a conversation, mentees in small groups would ask one another, “what’s your MOS (military occupational specialty)?” But other than that initial effort to establish a connection, military rank did not seem to matter to mentees. They did not use job titles or military ranks in their conversations, but that “is part of why it works” as an enforcer mentor explained. He went on to say, “It is not necessarily about the rank while in the military [that is important as a VTC mentor] but is about experience in the court.” Somewhat contradicting himself, though, that same enforcer mentor added, “And having officers as mentors helps with enforcing rules.” A mentor who many mentees referred to as “the Bible thumper” provided the starkest example of an enforcer mentor. According to

Strickland, a mentee, “he thinks it is his job” to make mentees comply with program requirements and “make [mentees] see the light.”

However, the enforcer role is muddled as there appears to be inconsistency in how mentors should behave when they discover that a mentee has broken the rules. Jake, a mentor, stated: “If a mentor knows or is told that his veteran is using [prohibited substances], the mentor should notify the probation department immediately.” Another mentor, Rusty, who fits the friend mentee role orientation (described below), takes a different approach. He stated that mentors should “Say as little as [they] can, [and] do not add [information],” when reporting to the judge. He went on to state that “the mentor is not there to tattle on the mentees; they are there for support. People just want someone to talk to.” It is possible that mentors, although well-intentioned members of the community, may become unwitting agents of criminal justice oversight.

Mentor as sponsor/advocate

The next type of mentor aligned their identity with that of a therapist or recovery facilitator. These mentors are the ones who viewed their role as providing encouragement and guidance to their mentee, someone who was available for support, set a positive example, and provided a variety of resources to mentees. This sentiment was evident among several mentors who mentioned that they took phone calls in the middle of the night from mentees who feared they might use drugs again.

This group of mentors may have felt comfortable with the sponsor role because substance use disorders/abuse are common among justice-involved individuals. Substance use recovery services, such as AA, rely on sponsor modalities. Mentors who identified with the sponsor role shared their own recovery stories, and to some extent, ingrained themselves in the recovery process. The perceived need for treatment-related sponsorship was prominent among mentors. Charles, a mentor, noted,

A lot of these [mentees] come in with alcohol or drug addiction. Alcohol works well for PTSD; [it] calms nerves, helps you sleep, helps with night terrors. AA is the best shot for sobriety. [I] love to see the lightbulb go off when they realize they don't have to drink.

Reentry programming may also operate in a sponsorship model. In one example of the sponsorship linkage between recovery and reintegration, Frank, a mentor, recalled that when he started serving as a mentor there was “Modest mentor training. [The] best training is [experience ... the] majority of mentors have experienced some addiction problems themselves ... [and they can provide a] good perspective.” Mentors

have also experienced military life and the transition back to civilian society, another manifestation of having “been there.” This mentoring style relies on the mentor’s ability to utilize shared experiences to subjectively build rapport with mentees, model appropriate behavior, and provide on-call support. Therefore, mentors inadvertently become integral to the therapeutic process, whether intended or not, through relationships and good Samaritan-ship.

The role of a sponsor is not well received by some of the mentees. In the traditional sense of substance abuse treatment, sponsorships benefit from a mutual understanding that the sponsored person can freely unload their troubles onto the sponsor. This level of comfort was not apparent among all mentees. For example, Seth, a mentee, says his “mentor is not someone to open up and spill the beans to.” Seth felt his mentor was there “only to support [him] and point [him] in the right directions” rather than being a friend to rely on as mentees managed their recovery or embraced law-abiding lifestyles. Rusty, a mentor who completed the VTC program, felt that the mentees confided in him more, because he had military and VTC experience. Still, Rusty explained that the mentees never told the mentors everything. Sometimes,

You have to tell [mentors] what they want to hear. The mentees do seem hesitant to open up and talk to the mentors at first, but they warm up to the mentors once they realize that [mentors] are not there to judge [mentees] or redirect the information back to the judge.

Within a sponsorship model, mentors would need to affirm adherence to confidentiality. While there were no indications that confidentiality had been compromised among this group of mentors and mentees, confidentiality was on the honor system. The idea of mentoring as sponsorship may be one-sided. Some mentees were hesitant to open-up to their mentors, which is not surprising given that VTC is a diversionary court program with real consequences for failure to abide by the rules.

The VTC team seemed to find this sponsorship model of mentoring the least desirable. Through direct communication during VTC meetings and training with mentors, the court expressly instructed mentors not to involve themselves in recovery or therapy efforts. Several mentors recounted embarrassing incidents when the judge publicly admonished them to remember that they were “not part of the [VTC] team.” One researcher observed a proceeding in which the judge cautioned a mentor against deviating from expectations. When the mentor attempted to give the judge feedback on a proposed sanction that the judge wanted to impose on a mentee, the judge interrupted the mentor mid-sentence to ask, “so [the mentee] had two contacts with

you last week?" Jim, a mentor who also was a retired attorney, had a similar experience. He expressed that he wanted to "speak out [in VTC hearings] and fix what I thought was not right." He stated that he

was quickly told [by the court] not to get involved in that way. [My role] was supposed to give them [car] rides, not treatment help or any recommendations even though many of us [mentors] have said to one another, "gee, we know this person better than the treatment team does."

Somewhat distinct from a mentor as sponsor though less frequently discussed among mentors, was the notion that mentors were advocates for their mentees. A small subset of sponsor mentors adopted this limited view of mentorship. As Jim stated, "It is the attorneys among us that want to advocate for our mentees." The court did not intend for mentors to take the role of advocate, and several were chastised in open court for advocating for their mentee during the VTC hearing. Bates, a mentor, elucidated this sentiment by mentioning that the treatment team "did not want anything from us other than weekly report on contacts; they did not want any advice."

Mentor as friend

A final role mentors defined for themselves was that of older, wiser friends, or "battle buddies." Mentor as friend was perhaps equivalent to a senior military member but within the same rank structure. For example, the mentee might be a metaphorical first lieutenant to the mentor's major; corporal to staff sergeant. In this role, mentors provided amiable guidance and social connections while also swapping war stories – both real and paradoxical – to connect on a personal level. In the role of a friend, mentors were a listening ear, but not much more.

Mentors who identified with the friend role easily verbalized their position. Rick saw his role as a mentor "to be an older brother to a veteran who is having a hard time. Someone they can call and say, 'hey I'm having a problem with this, any idea what I can do?'" A more somber function of being a friend to mentees was evidenced by Jake, a mentor whose mentee graduated before the interview. Jake stated:

[He was the] most depressed guy. [We'd talk] every day; talked for two hours a day sometimes, trying to figure out a reason for him to live. I can turn daylight into darkness, [and] even on a rainy day, there's always sunny skies above the clouds. But I had a time convincing this guy of that. [He's] now doing better.

This camaraderie was a two-way street between mentors and mentees. One mentee, Arthur, mentioned that his mentor served in Vietnam, and described how they frequently “exchange[d] stories about what we did in the service.” He elaborated by saying that “we both had bad companies; [in mine] we had 18 commanders in 21 months.” Arthur’s mentor sympathized with the stress that the situation could cause. Another mentee, Carl, felt a sense of kinship toward his mentor, stating that he “would go into withdrawal if Frank missed my calls; I count on [our] relationship.” The friendship often extends beyond the VTC time period. Ryan, a mentor, said that “the most rewarding part” is the relationships, “the bonds,” he developed with the mentees. His mentee graduated a few months before the interview, and the mentee expressed a desire to keep the friendship going. Ryan was thrilled. Ryan recounted, “he was like, are you going to get someone else? Are you going to leave me? We still talk two or three times a week and have breakfast every Monday. We have each other’s [phone] numbers.”

Jake, a long-time mentor, expressed caution of the mentor as a friend role. “Real life experiences taught me to be careful about not making [financial] loans [and] not becoming a taxi service. [I] learned this from both [mentoring and military] training.” In conversations with the interviewer, he verbalized that he knew that he and other mentors needed to be a “buddy” and friend to their mentee but was also cautious about becoming too involved with personal issues such as family disputes and other interactions typical of a true friendship. Jake intimated that “many of the mentors want to try to solve everything [for the mentee, but] the[ir] job is to listen and facilitate.”

Interestingly, while there was a notion of mentor as friend among a subset of the mentors, none of the mentors or mentees perceived themselves to be “peers.” They thought of peers as people at the same stage of life or being in comparable circumstances. Individuals going through the VTC program are deprived, at least on some level, of their liberty, while the mentors are free, law-abiding community members. Mentees perceived their mentors to be of superior rank or social standing, while mentors perceived their mentees to be subordinate or of lower rank. This perception of being on different levels and belief that one group is superior or inferior to the other is a schism in the meaning of friendship. This hierarchy perception may explain some issues mentors faced when performing their duties and the disconnect mentees felt between themselves and their mentors. Because of this, clarity of the mentor’s roles is important.

Mentor responsibilities

Turning now to mentor responsibilities, discussions with VTC mentors, mentees, and team members demonstrated a lack of clarity on mentor duties or obligations. This vagueness is evidence of the inconsistencies in the ways mentors and mentees defined mentor roles.

Mentees' VTC responsibilities are clear and numerous, except concerning their relationship with their mentors. Mentees have extensive reporting requirements and activity requirements. They must attend court every other week, and some are required to attend every week. They must arrive at least an hour before court to have meetings with other mentees. Each week mentees must perform community service, work, or seek employment (unless they are fully disabled), and have at least two contacts with their mentor. They must also document that they have attended their substance abuse counseling and any other mandated counseling sessions, and they get drug tested each week. There are plenty of rules for the mentees.

There were almost no rules for the mentors. Mentors reported they had no formal training, no real handbook, and no codes of conduct. Many of them took an online course sponsored by Justice for Vets, which is associated with the National Association for Drug Court Professionals, to learn about VTC the mentoring component.

Mentors who were officers in the military and/or who worked in professions such as law and business, particularly bristled at their "lack of a defined mission" and their relative powerlessness. Whereas mentees were "used to being told to shut up and color," mentors experienced anxiety and frustration when they were not allowed to "deploy skills" that they believed would help mentees and increase the efficiency of the VTC. Mentor Alan, for example, stated he

wanted to be of help because of my background as an officer, [I] know how to 'grease the skids'- make things happen. [I] was an Inspector General in the Army, so [I] know how to help people. If anyone can knock down doors if there is a problem, it is me. Let's figure out how we can do it, not why we can't. If there are people in need of help and they couldn't get it elsewhere, let's help them.

Inability to clearly articulate mentor responsibilities was not for lack of wanting direction from the VTC. Mentors were often frustrated by the lack of formal responsibility to impart meaningful change or provide needed assistance to mentees.

Mentors are expected to attend court hearings at least once per month and contact their mentee by phone or in-person a minimum of once per week. Despite the expectation, there is no policy surrounding how frequently mentors should engage with their mentee and other mentees in the pre-hearing session. Jim, a mentor, thought it would be good for mentors to attend the weekly VTC team meetings to share what they know about the mentees. The VTC team denied this suggestion. He felt “frustrated; [I] have a lot to share” about Lawson, his mentee. Frank, another mentor, expressed similar thwarting of potential beneficence:

When this was reaching a boiling point, there was some discussion about us mentors meeting with the team when they were talking about our guy. [I] prepared a lengthy report on what was going right, wrong, challenges [my mentee] was facing, and some ideas for improvement for him. [I] was told not to do this. [The] judge said “no, we don’t want anything from the mentors except a weekly report on [or number of] contacts.”

This pushback was frustrating because Frank felt that he had unique insight to share with the court. He grimly acknowledged that the constraints made it much easier for him to do his weekly report, which he said only took three to four minutes instead of the hours he spent preparing a substantive report that was rejected by the VTC team. During a different court session, a mentor made suggestions for the mentee’s case, and a probation officer defended the mentor because the judge questioned why the mentor was speaking. There was obvious tension between the mentors wanting to do more and the VTC team wanting the mentors to “stay in their lane,” even though that lane’s boundaries were not clear.

Mentor roles were not quite informal, yet their duties were not formalized, leaving mentors’ responsibilities ambiguous, vague, and open to interpretation. Alan, a mentor, voiced this dissociative identity conundrum. He said,

My role in court is not [as] an officer or an employee. I’m a representative, sort of like an Army ambassador. The judge doesn’t ask me for any input, but I always go up to the bench with [my mentee]. [I] speak [in court] because the judge teases [my mentee], asking “is Alan taking care of you?”

The lack of concrete responsibilities may blur the formality and expectations surrounding the mentee and mentor's information. For example, Travis and Bobby were not afraid of talking to their mentors. They are also not scared about any information they share getting back to the judge. These mentees shared with

interviewers that their mentors were “there for support, not to snitch.” Travis further noted that there are few secrets in the program, to which he provided an example of someone being admonished in front of the whole group for a minor infraction of program rules. This example reinforced the idea that the entire group knows when a mentee makes a mistake. Their transgressions are not private, and there is no perceived need for more formal confidentiality protections such as those in an attorney-client relationship.

Discussion

As discussed above, extensive scholarship describes the important role mentors can play among civilian populations, criminal justice populations, and in the military (Bagnall et al., 2015; Bauldry et al., 2009; Buck, 2018; Farley & Hackman, 2006; Griffiths & Bailey, 2015; Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019; Rowe et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2019). The VTC model attempts to leverage the success of mentoring in other venues and the anecdotal success described by Judge Russell in the Buffalo VTC. Our study contributes to the growing body of research on mentoring programs in VTCs. Perhaps most importantly, it complements Jalain and Grossi's work (2020), wherein they focus more heavily on court personnel's perspectives. This study adds another dimension to the analysis and suggests that scholars can do more work to unpack how all stakeholders experience mentoring programs. In finding that there are at least three types of mentoring styles (the enforcer, the sponsor/advocate, and the friend), this study also indicates that forces outside the VTC may color stakeholders' perceptions of mentoring programs. As Lucas (2018) discussed, peer mentors take an individualized approach to their roles as mentors, and this study adds depth to that discussion.

Overall, all respondents perceived the mentor program as an integral part of the VTC process. However, a lack of clarity of mentors' roles and responsibilities created numerous problems that affected mentor-mentee relationships and mentors' relationships with the court. Additionally, lack of structure and training allowed the mentors to choose their own mentoring style and curate their own responsibilities.

The current study found that the lack of clear guidance and formalized doctrine on mentors' responsibilities begs the question, are mentors merely serving a symbolic function, or is there capacity for a substantive role? The perception among the mentors in this VTC was that they were underutilized and undervalued. From a management perspective, the lack of guidance also means there were no enforcement mechanisms to control or monitor mentors' actions. The interviews with mentors and VTC team members revealed an underlying tension between what role mentors wanted

to play and what role the VTC team wanted them to play. Caught betwixt and between, the mentors and mentees were left confused.

The lack of structure created opportunities for mentors to devise their own responsibilities. Lack of training and structure was also a problem. Mentors did not know what the court expected them to do, so they did what they thought was best. They were noble in their desire to help, but the judicial context and potentially punitive outcomes of VTCs made this unstructured benevolence potentially problematic from due process and practical perspectives. The study demonstrated that not all mentees were treated the same by their mentors, and there were no means of supervising, measuring, or controlling mentors' conduct. This lack of direction can have fatal consequences. In this court, mentors did not know how to monitor compliance with court requirements such as drug testing. A lack of training was brought into tragic, stark relief when a mentee set to graduate from the local community college with her associate's degree and from the VTC, died by overdose a few days before graduation (see Douds & Hummer, 2019). Through delicate interviews, it was learned that many mentees and several mentors expressed objective reasons to suspect that she had been using drugs again. Some of the mentees felt that it would resolve itself. "I thought that she could handle it," said one. Others feared being stigmatized as a "narc." Some stated that they did not want to "rock the boat." The lack of understanding of how to discuss potential life-saving information poses a challenge and a great opportunity for this court and other VTCs (Douds & Hummer, 2019).

All stakeholders in this VTC valued mentors across the board and viewed mentoring as a distinctive and invaluable component of the VTC experience. All respondents also concurred that mentors were selfless volunteers with the best of intentions. Yet noble intent is not enough to justify mentoring programs that have the potential to jeopardize veterans' rights, including the right to fair and consistent processes in this criminal justice setting. Moreover, the VTC must define the lack of clarity on mentors' duty to disclose infractions (or their right to withhold that information).

Limitations

While this study provides insight into mentoring within the context of VTCs and the varying roles of VTC mentors, this study has its limitations. Specifically, our study's qualitative data use a sample of mentors, mentees, and VTC team members in one Pennsylvania VTC. Although the research team conducted interviews until we achieved data saturation, it is possible that different themes would emerge in other VTCs. Thus, these data are not generalizable, and it would be worthwhile to examine VTC

mentoring programs in locations throughout the United States and abroad. This replication is increasingly important as one of the two other recent studies that have examined mentors in VTCs also was conducted in Pennsylvania, and the other was conducted in two Midwestern states (Jalain & Grossi, 2020; Lucas, 2018).

Additionally, as noted above, future phenomenological studies of VTC programs, including mentoring programs, should incorporate more rigorous participant validation procedures and negative case analysis to improve the findings' reliability. Finally, all findings must be interpreted with the potential for social desirability bias in mind. Several of the interviews were conducted where others could hear what interviewees said, increasing the risk of such bias.

Implications for research and practice

The current study's results open lines for future research on the topic of mentoring in VTCs. Given the three types of mentor roles identified in this study—enforcer, sponsor/advocate, and friend—future research should seek to distinguish how and why mentors align with specific roles and how increased training could increase the clarity of a mentor's duties. Moreover, both qualitative and quantitative research is needed to examine how VTC mentors increase VTC participants' surveillance and the consequences of such surveillance. In our study, VTC team members did not provide mentors with guidelines regarding what they should or should not disclose to the court, and some mentors within our sample felt the need to inform the court of violations. Such ambiguity calls into question the fidelity of mentoring programs as initially conceptualized, where confidentiality is seen as a hallmark component, and the true justification of having mentors as part of the VTC team. Finally, another line of future inquiry stems from the interactions between mentors and mentees. It would be prudent for researchers to explore the kinds of interactions during mentoring sessions and the impact of various types of interactions on desired outcomes.

This study provides the necessary data to support the development of practices that can aid VTCs in embracing mentoring as a key part of their programming. Firstly, an important implication stemming from this research is the need to professionalize mentoring programs in VTCs. Timko and colleagues (2017) suggest that courts employ paid mentor coordinators to respond to the types of issues highlighted in this study. Making mentors formal VTC team members and professionalizing the role with clear responsibilities would naturally provide the need to impose structure and set expectations that are presently ambiguous or missing.

Secondly and relatedly, there is a desperate need to provide mentors with formal training specific to the distinct needs and desires of the VTC. This training should include initial and follow-up training, and, although beneficial, it should move beyond the Justice for Vets online mentoring course. Mentors in this VTC reported they had no formal training, handbook, nor codes of conduct, which does not appear to be uncommon in VTCs (see also Jalain & Grossi, 2020; Lucas, 2018). Recent research suggests that VTC mentors who attend formal training find such training to be worthwhile (Jalain & Grossi, 2020), and other justice-based mentoring programs find that formal mentor training improves the effectiveness of the programs (Miller et al., 2013). Moore (2012, p. 42), for example, suggests mentor training include: (1) procedures should they suspect that a mentee has violated a court order or used substances in violation of the terms of their VTC participation; (2) addiction issues and giving preference to mentors who have been in recovery or otherwise have experience coping with addiction and substance abuse; and (3) sexual trauma and its implications for mentees. We submit VTCs should provide that equivalent training to mentees to understand what they should expect from mentors and what they should communicate to mentors and the court.

Finally, this study identified the need for clarity in mentor roles and responsibilities and how they carry out the intended goals of mentorship within the context of VTCs. This study revealed tensions between what mentors want to do and what the VTC team expects mentors to do, all of which need resolution. As they stand, VTC mentor programs, as with other justice-based mentoring programs, are under-theorized. There is little discussion of the program's goals and how it is expected that mentors will assist in achieving program goals (Newburn & Shiner, 2006). With limited guidance, the roles and responsibilities for mentors could be endless. As such, practitioners should focus on establishing clear roles and responsibilities for VTC mentors and determining how to train them for the job best. According to Hucklesby and Wincup (2014), interactions between mentors and mentees should focus on instrumental goals and move beyond mundane social interaction. Simultaneously, if done effectively, elucidating duties and expectations may ameliorate many of the concerns identified in this study regarding the VTC mentoring program while also strengthening meaningful mentor-mentee relationships.

Conclusion

This study used qualitative interviews and observations to enhance our knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of VTC mentors through the lens of VTC mentors,

mentees, and staff. A lack of clear guidance and training led mentors to devise their own roles and responsibilities, which resulted in the emergence of three mentoring styles—the enforcer, the sponsor/advocate, and the friend. While all respondents saw the mentoring program as integral to the VTC, it is still unknown whether mentors merely serve a symbolic function or play a substantive role in VTCs. Indeed, more research is needed to unpack the purpose and effects of VTC mentors fully.

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, 41*(1), 83-96.
- Allen, T. D., & Eby, L. T. (2007). *The Blackwell handbook of mentoring: A multiple perspectives approach*. Blackwell Publishing. DOI: 10.1111/b.9781405133739.2007.x
- Armour, M., Rivaux, S. L., & Bell, H. (2009). Using context to build rigor: Application to two hermeneutic phenomenological studies. *Qualitative Social Work, 8*(1), 101-122.
- Arno, C. (2014). Proportional response: The need for more-and more standardized-veterans' court. *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform, 48*, 1039-1072.
- Bagnall, A. M., South, J., Hulme, C., Woodall, J., Vinall-Collier, K., Raine, G., ... & Wright, N. M. (2015). A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of peer education and peer support in prisons. *BMC Public Health, 15*(1), 290. DOI: 10.1186/s12889-015-1584-x
- Bauldry, S., Korom-Djakovic, D., McClanahan, W. S., McMaken, J., & Kotloff, L. J. (2009). *Mentoring formerly incarcerated adults: Insights from the Ready4Work Reentry Initiative*. Field report Series. Public/Private Ventures.
- Bazeley, P. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: Practical strategies*. Sage.
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: a tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation?. *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802-1811.
- Brown, C., Besterman-Dahan, K., Chavez, M., Njoh, E., & Smith, W. (2016). "It gave me an excuse to get out into society again": Decreasing veteran isolation through a community agricultural peer support model. *Journal of Veterans Studies, 1*(1), 163-204. DOI: 10.21061/jvs.42

- Bryman, A. (2004). Member validation and check. In M. S. Lewis-Black, A. Bryman, & T. F. Liao (Eds.), *The Sage Encyclopedia Social Science Research Methods* (pp. 1143-1144). Sage.
- Buck, G. (2018). The core conditions of peer mentoring. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 18(2), 190-206. DOI: 10.1177/1748895817699659
- Buffalo Veteran's Court. (2009). *Mentoring and Veterans Hospital Program Policy and Procedure Manual*. National Drug Court Resource Center. http://ndcrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/vets_court_p_and_p_2009.pdf.
- Burke, C, Keaton, S., Schroeder, G., & Ocheltree, K. (2019). *Veterans moving forward: Process and impact evaluation results of the San Diego County Sheriff's Department VMF Program*. San Diego Association of Government. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37192.v1>
- Carter, S. P., Dudley, W., Lyle, D. S., & Smith, J. Z. (2016). *The effects of mentor quality, exposure, and type on junior officer retention in the United States Army*. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Cascio, M. A., Lee, E., Vaudrin, N., & Freedman, D. A. (2019). A team-based approach to open coding: Considerations for creating intercoder consensus. *Field Methods*, 31(2), 116-130.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Cohen, N. H. (2003). The journey of the principles of adult mentoring inventory. *Adult Learning*, 14(1), 4-7. DOI:10.1177/104515950301400102
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Dibley, L. (2011). Analysing narrative data using McCormack's Lenses. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(3). DOI: 10.7748/nr2011.04.18.3.13.c8458
- Douds, A. S., Ahlin, E. M., Howard, D., & Stigerwalt, S. (2017). Varieties of veterans' courts: A statewide assessment of veterans' treatment court components. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 28(8), 740-769. DOI: 10.1177/0887403415620633
- Douds, A. S., & Hummer, D. (2019). When a Veterans' Treatment Court Fails: Lessons Learned from a Qualitative Evaluation. *Victims & Offenders*, 14(3), 322-343. DOI:

10.108015564886.2019.1595248

Druzin, H. (2015). Having veterans as mentors is key to treatment court success stories. Retrieved from <https://www.stripes.com/having-veterans-as-mentors-is-key-to-treatment-court-success-stories-1.360274>.

Farley, C., & Hackman, S. (2006). *Ready4Work "In Brief": Interim outcomes are in: Recidivism at half the national average*. Public/Private Ventures.

Fletcher, R. C., & Sherk, J. (2009). *Mentoring former prisoners: A guide for reentry programs*. Public/Private Ventures.

Griffiths, L., & Bailey, D. (2015). Learning from peer support schemes —can prison listeners support offenders who self-injure in custody?. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*. DOI: 10.1108/IJPH-01-2015-0004

Grossman, J. B., & Tierney, J. P. (1998). Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. *Evaluation Review*, 22(3), 403-426. DOI: 10.1177/0193841X9802200304

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82 DOI: 10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hanham, J., & Tracey, D. (2017). Evolution of mentoring relationships involving young male offenders transitioning from a juvenile justice centre to the community. *Youth Justice*, 17(2), 116-133. DOI: 10.1177/1473225417699169

Hartley, R. D., & Baldwin, J. M. (2019). Waging war on recidivism among justice-involved veterans: An impact evaluation of a large urban veterans treatment court. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 30(1), 52-78. DOI: 10.1177/0887403416650490

Hill, L. H., & Wheat, C. A. (2017). The influence of mentorship and role models on university women leaders' career paths to university presidency. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(8), 2090.

Holbrook, J. G., & Anderson, S. (2011). *Veterans courts: Early outcomes and key indicators for success* (Widener Law School Legal Studies Research Paper No. 11-25). Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1912655 DOI: 10.4324/9781315626574-3

Hucklesby, A. (2011). *Bail support schemes for adults*. Policy Press. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t8973n>

Hucklesby, A. L., & Wincup, E. (2014). Assistance, support and monitoring? The paradoxes of mentoring adults in the criminal justice system. *Journal of Social Policy*, 43(2), 373-390. DOI: 10.1017/S0047279413001013

Izadinia, M. (2015). A closer look at the role of mentor teachers in shaping preservice teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 52, 1-10. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2015.08.003

Jalain, C. I., & Grossi, E. L. (2020). Take a load off Fanny: Peer mentors in veterans treatment courts. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 31(8), 1165-1192.

Johnson, W. B., & Andersen, G. R. (2010). Formal mentoring in the US military: Research evidence, lingering questions, and recommendations. *Naval War College Review*, 63(2), 113-126.

Justice for Vets. (2017, March 20). *Ten key components for veterans treatment courts*. Retrieved from <https://justiceforvets.org/resource/ten-key-components-of-veterans-treatment-courts/>

Justice for Vets. (2020). Ten Key Components of Veterans Treatment Courts. Retrieved from <https://justiceforvets.org/resources/resource-library/general-veterans-treatment-court/>

Kimball, R. A. (2015). It takes more than rank to make a mentor. *Army: The Magazine of the Association of the United States Army*.

Klinge, C. M. (2015). A conceptual framework for mentoring in a learning organization. *Adult Learning*, 26(4), 160-166. DOI: 10.1177/1045159515594154

Knox, S., & Burkard, A. W. (2009). Qualitative research interviews. *Psychotherapy Research*, 19(4-5), 566-575.

Lapointe, É., & Vandenberghe, C. (2017). Supervisory mentoring and employee affective commitment and turnover: The critical role of contextual factors. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 98, 98-10. DOI: 10.1016/j.jvb.2016.10.004

Lucas, P. A. (2018). An exploratory study of veterans treatment court peer mentors: Roles, experiences, and expectations. *Drug Court Review*, 1, 59-68.

McCall, J. D., Tsai, J., & Gordon, A. J. (2018). Veterans treatment court research: Participant characteristics, outcomes, and gaps in the literature. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 57*(6), 384-401. DOI: 10.1080/10509674.2018.1510864

McGuire, M. A. (2007). *A joint perspective on mentoring: A look by senior military officers across the services on the prevalence and contribution of mentoring relationships* (Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest Information & Learning).

Miller, J. M., Barnes, J. C., Miller, H. V., & McKinnon, L. (2013). Exploring the link between mentoring program structure & success rates: Results from a national survey. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 38*, 439-456.

Money, N., Moore, M., Brown, D., Kasper, K., Roeder, J., Bartone, P., & Bates, M. (2011). Best practices identified for peer support programs. *Article Defense Center of Excellence, 1-50*. DOI:0000-0003-0732-1248

Moore, E. C. (2012). A mentor in combat veterans court: Observations and challenges. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsc.org/sitecore/content/microsites/future-trends-2012/home/Courts-andthe-Community/3-1-A-Mentor-in-Combat-Veterans-Court.aspx>
DOI: 10.1080/10509674.2018.1510864

Morin, R. (2011). *The difficult transition from military to civilian life*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/12/08/the-difficult-transition-from-military-to-civilian-life/>

Newburn, T., & Shiner, M. (2006). Young people, mentoring and social isolation. *Youth Justice, 6*(1), 23-41. DOI: 10.1177/1473225406063450

Nixon, S. (2020). 'Giving back and getting on with my life': Peer mentoring, desistance and recovery of ex-offenders. *Probation Journal, 67*(1), 47-64.
DOI:10.1177/0264550519900249

Pogrebin, M. (2003). *Qualitative approaches to criminal justice: Perspectives from the field*. Sage.

Ragins, B. R., & Kram, K. E. (2007). *The handbook of mentoring at work: Theory, research, and practice*. Sage.

Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., Rana, R. E., Jetelina, K. K., & Roberts, M. H. (2019). The value of lived experience with the criminal justice system: A qualitative study of peer re-

entry specialists. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 63(10), 1861-1875. DOI: 10.1177/0306624X19830596

Repper, J., & Carter, T. (2011). A review of the literature on peer support in mental health services. *Journal of Mental Health*, 20(4), 392-411. DOI: 10.3109/09638237.2011.583947

Rieckhoff, P., Schleifer, J., & McCarthy, M. (2012). IAVA 2012 Member Survey. *New York: Iraq and Afghanistan*. DOI: 10.3109/09638237.2011.583947

Rowe, M., Bellamy, C., Baranoski, M., Wieland, M., O'Connell, M. J., Benedict, P., Davidson, L., Buchanan, J., & Sells, D. (2007). A peer-support, group intervention to reduce substance use and criminality among persons with severe mental illness. *Psychiatric Services*, 58(7), 955-961. DOI: 10.1176/ps.2007.58.7.955

Saperstein, A. K., Viera, A. J., & Firnhaber, G. C. (2012). Mentorship and job satisfaction among Navy family physicians. *Military Medicine*, 177(8), 883-888. DOI: 10.7205/milmed-d-11-00362

Schaffer, B. J. (2016). Incarcerated veterans outreach program. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 13(3), 293-304. DOI: 10.1186/s40352-019-0086-9

Singh, S., Cale, J., & Armstrong, K. (2019). Breaking the cycle: understanding the needs of women involved in the criminal justice system and the role of mentoring in promoting desistance. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 63(8), 1330-1353. DOI:10.1177/0306624X18818922

Smith, D. G., & Rosenstein, J. E. (2017). Gender and the military profession: Early career influences, attitudes, and intentions. *Armed Forces & Society*, 43(2), 260-279. DOI: 10.1177/0095327x15626722

Solomon, P. (2004). Peer support/peer provided services underlying processes, benefits, and critical ingredients. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 27(4), 392. DOI: 10.2975/27.2004.392.401

Steinberg, A. G., & Nourizadeh, S. M. (2001, August). Superior, peer and subordinate mentoring in the US Army. In *Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, August*.

Timko, C., Flatley, B., Tjemsland, A., McGuire, J., Clark, S., Blue-Howells, J., ... & Finlay, A. (2016). A longitudinal examination of veterans treatment courts' characteristics and

eligibility criteria. *Justice Research and Policy*, 17(2), 123-136. PMID: PMC6051754

Williams, M., & Moser, T. (2019). The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International Management Review*, 15(1), 45-55.

Wilson, V. (2014). Research methods: triangulation. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 9(1), 74-75.

Contributors

Anne S. Douds, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Public Policy Program at Gettysburg College. A retired trial attorney, she regularly worked on cases involving veterans' issues over two decades of trial practice. Her latest research borrows from systems analysis to examine victims' rights and information technology in criminal justice settings, including veterans courts. She recently published in *Victims and Offenders*, *The Annals of Health Law and Policy*, and *Criminal Justice Review*. She is author or co-author of four books, including *The Veterans Treatment Court Movement: Striving to Serve Those Who Served* (Routledge) and *Taking Problem-Solving Courts to Scale: Diverse Applications of the Specialty Court Model* (Lexington Books). She received the 2019 Faculty Mentoring Award and the 2020 Dr. Ralph Cavaliere Endowed Teaching Award.

Eileen M. Ahlin, PhD, is Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Penn State Harrisburg. She uses an ecological framework to study violence and to identify policies and practices that address risk and protective factors among informal and formal social controls. She was named a 2016 W.E.B. Du Bois Fellow by the National Institute of Justice, when she and Dr. Maria João Lobo Antunes were awarded a grant to examine how residential mobility influences violence among marginalized populations. Her recent research appears in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *Race and Justice*, and *The Prison Journal*. She is author or co-author of several books and edited volumes, including the forthcoming titles *Youth Violence in Context: An Ecological Routine Activity Framework* (Routledge) and *Taking Problem-Solving Courts to Scale: Diverse Applications of the Specialty Court Model* (Lexington Books). Dr. Ahlin was the 2020 recipient of Penn State Harrisburg's Excellence in Research and Scholarly Activity Award.

Dr. Cassandra Atkin-Plunk, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida Atlantic University. Her research interests span both institutional and community corrections with an emphasis on contemporary issues in corrections, including the reentry and reintegration of offenders and problem-solving

courts. Dr. Atkin-Plunk examines evidence-based practices and conducts program and policy evaluations to identify what works in corrections. Her research is largely community-based, and she won the 2018 FAU Presidential Award for Outstanding Community-Engaged Research. Her research has been published in *Justice Quarterly*, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, and *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*.

Michael Posteraro is a Child Protective Services Caseworker/Investigator at Dauphin County Children and Youth Services. He is also a Clinical Psychology graduate student at Penn State Harrisburg.

Reviews