

# MORAL INJURY

## MORAL INJURY AMONG THE VETERAN COMMUNITY



### KEY FACTS

- Moral injury doesn't just affect military members. Healthcare workers, police, emergency medical services, firefighters can all be affected.
- Moral injury can become a barrier to care.
- It **does NOT require** involvement with, or engagement in, combat.
- There is not a significant association between combat deployments and suicide.
- While many of the symptoms overlap, moral injury and PTSD are not mutually exclusive.

### RISKS

- Being emotionally unprepared, lacking social support, dealing with highly traumatic situations
- Exhaustion and Fatigue: constant fight-or-flight response activation contributes to moral injury, as it predisposes the service member psyche to moral injury.
  - Physiological exhaustion
  - Lack of sleep
  - Lack of food, water, nourishment
  - Impact of the elements (environmental, weather, leadership)

### WHAT IS MORAL INJURY?

- Intense psychological response or feelings following actions or (lack of actions) that occur after a traumatic or adverse event which may cause withdrawal from society.
- Acting or witnessing an act or behavior that violates assumptions and beliefs about right and wrong and personal goodness (Litz, et.al., 2009). These acts or events contradict the individual's deeply held moral beliefs and/or expectations.
- An act of commission is when one does something that is not in-line with their beliefs and an act of omission is when one fails to do something in-line with their beliefs. The one affected by MI does not have to be the one that transgressed the individual's moral beliefs (e.g.: betrayal by commander or trusted ally).
- Unlike post-traumatic stress disorder, which can occur following threat-based trauma, potentially morally injurious events do not necessarily involve a threat to life. Rather, morally injurious events threaten one's deeply held beliefs and trust. **Moral injury is not considered a mental illness.** However, an individual's experiences of potentially morally injurious events can cause profound feelings of shame, disgust, anger and guilt, and alterations in cognitions and beliefs (e.g., "I am a failure," "colleagues don't care about me"), as well as **maladaptive coping responses** (e.g. substance misuse, social withdrawal, or self-destructive acts.)



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## HOW TO HELP

- Give someone suffering the feeling that they are not alone.
- Talk about the moral dilemma with individuals outside of those involved.
- Participate in mindful activities like yoga, Reiki, surfing, swimming, meditation
- Prolonged Exposure (PE) therapy & Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Adaptive Disclosure Therapy (ADT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) & Religious Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (RCBT)
- Several faith-based approaches (Building Spiritual Strength (BSS), Spiritually Integrated Cognitive Processing Therapy (SICPT))
- Pastoral Care interventions

## RECOMMENDATIONS & RESOURCES

### BOOKS AND READINGS

#### **Warrior:**

*Dr. Shauna Springer, Ph.D.*

#### **What have we done:**

*The moral injury of our longest wars.*  
*David Wood*

#### **Soul Repair:**

*Recovering from moral injury after war.*  
*Gabriella Lettini*



### RESOURCES



#### **WARRIORS HEART**

*Addiction, Mental Health for military veterans and first responders*



#### **ALL SECURE FOUNDATION**

*Mental health and family/marriage*



## QUICK STATS

- During OIF/OEF, 60% of service members saw a critically injured/wounded woman and/or child, but could not help them.
- Infantry, Special Operations, and Combat Medics have the highest risks for suicidality following service, related to moral injury.
- Concurrent MI and PTSD is associated with increased depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

## RESOURCES & RECOMMENDATIONS



### **CHELSEY SIMONI**

*HunterSeven Foundation  
Clinical Nurse Researcher, Founder  
Emergency & Trauma Nurse*

*"I watch them push their pain through their eyes, crying and relaying their helplessness as their loved ones slowly decline and die right before my eyes. As I try to push the medications and press the life back into their lungs and chest, I fail.*

*I tell that family member who has placed all their trust and hope onto me, that I have tried everything I can to save their loved one, to save the woman who gave birth to them or the brother who was their best friend. My time in service has prepared me for everything I've faced thus far, but it hasn't prepared me for this. This pandemic has been a humbling experience; absolute uncontrolled, unexpected chaos and a deep dive into one hell of a moral injury"*