Compromised Conscience
Towards Managing Moral Injuries in Public Safety Personnel

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Today's Presenters

Liana Lentz, Ph.D.
- Postdoctoral Associate at Western University
- Dr. Lentz's research focuses on musculoskeletal and psychological injury in PSP
- Former police officer

Lorraine Smith-MacDonald, Ph.D., CCC, ACTA
- Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Alberta in the Heroes in Mind Advocacy and Research Consortium (HiMARC)
- Dr. Smith-MacDonald's clinical/academic career has focused on moral injury and the mental and spiritual health and wellbeing within military and Veteran populations
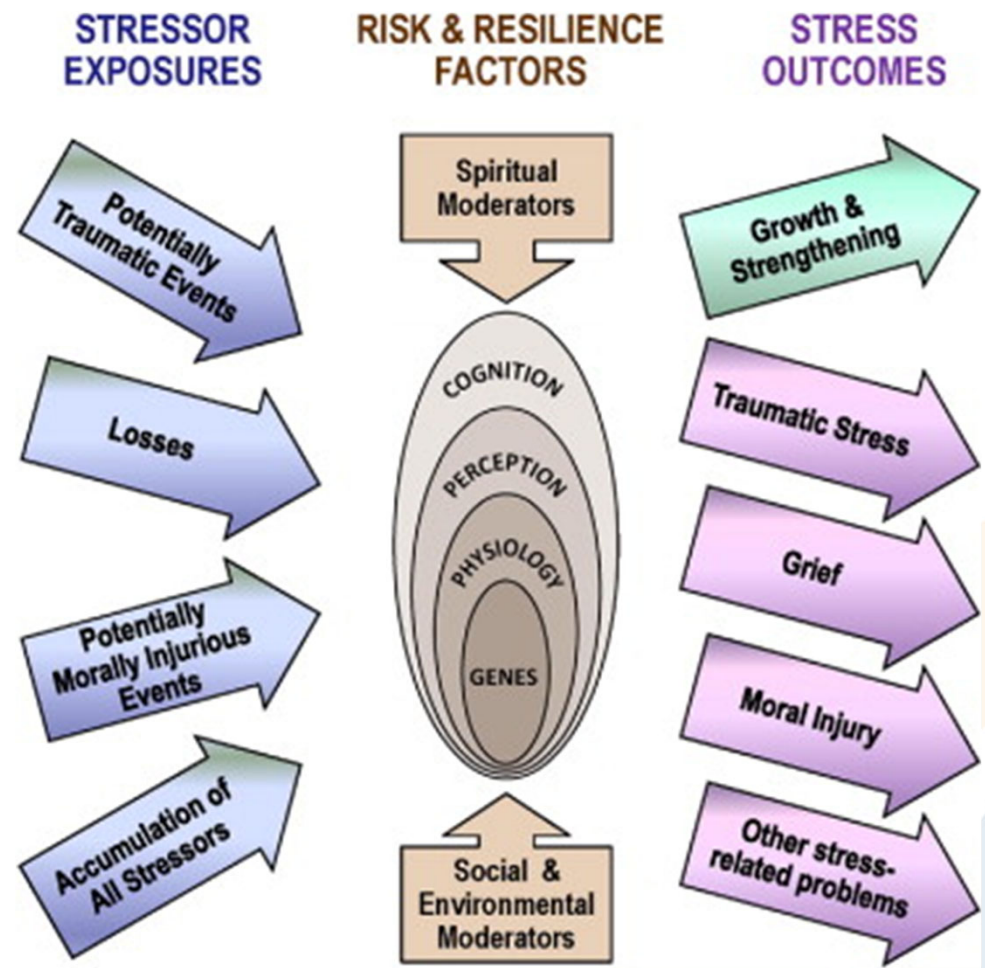
Learning Objectives

1. Define moral suffering, moral distress and moral injury

1. Identify symptoms related to moral distress and moral injury

1. Discuss the relevance and implications of moral injury in public safety and emergency management personnel

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Not all injuries are traumatic...

Operational Stress Model
(Nash et al., 2010)

STRESSOR EXPOSURES — RISK & RESILIENCE FACTORS — STRESS OUTCOMES

Potentially Traumatic Events / Losses / Potentially Morally Injurious Events / Accumulation of All Stressors

Spiritual Moderators / COGNITION / PERCEPTION / PHYSIOLOGY / GENES / Social & Environmental Moderators

Growth & Strengthening / Traumatic Stress / Grief / Moral Injury / Other stress-related problems

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Moral Suffering/Moral Frustration

Moral suffering is the "anguish experienced in response to various forms of moral adversity, such as moral harms, wrongs or failures, or unrelieved moral stress" (Rushton, 2018).

Moral suffering has its roots in our concern for others and our intentions to bring about beneficial outcomes, to relieve the pain and suffering of others, or to rectify an injustice.

Simply, we feel moral pain or distress because we are human and have created social connections and are moved by our moral principles.
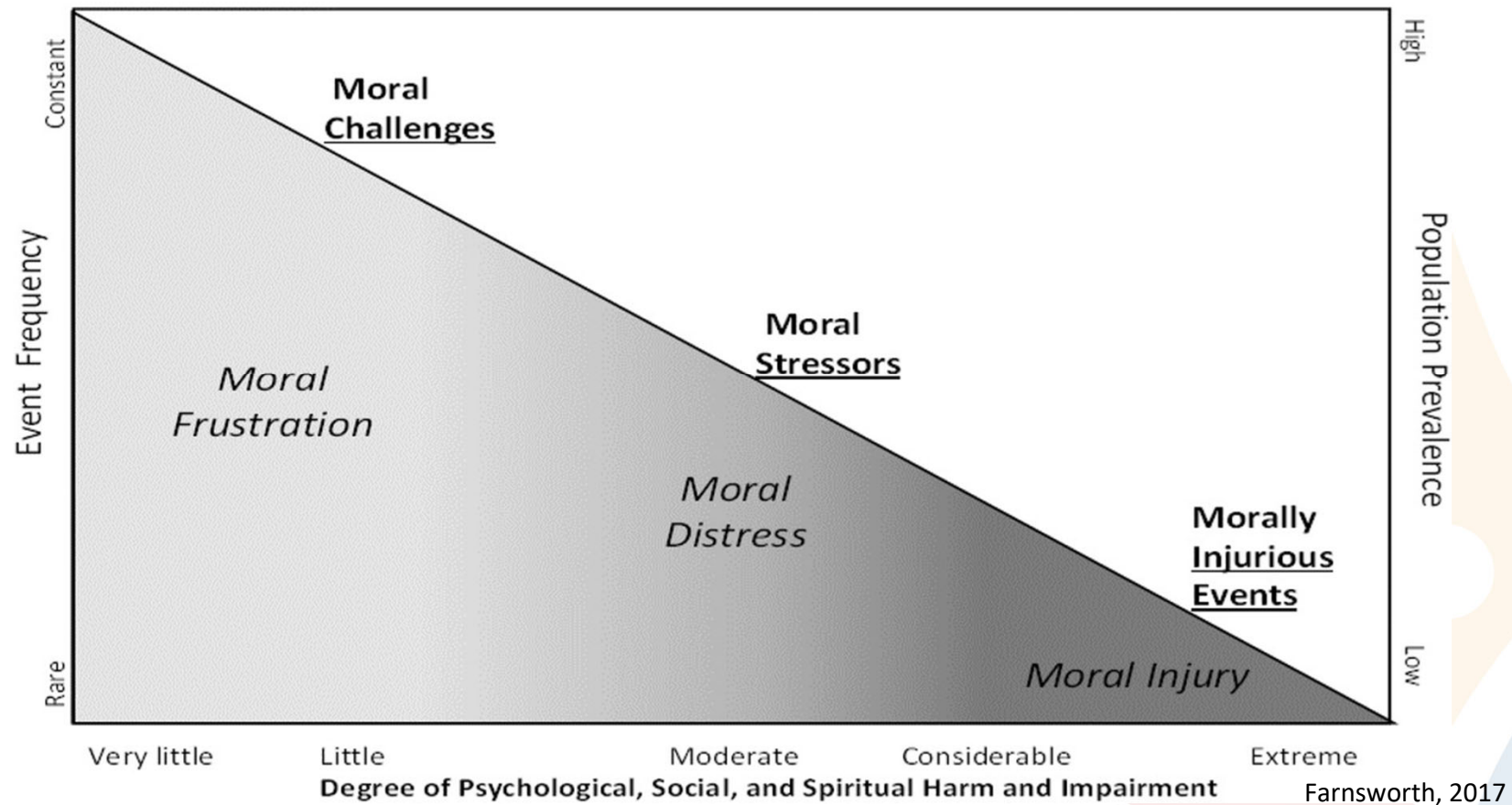
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Why Moral Injury?

Moral injury refers to the psychological, social and spiritual impact of events involving betrayal or transgression of one's own deeply held moral beliefs and values.

Moral Injury can occur when a person is exposed to potential a *psychologically traumatic experience* (PPTE) or a *potentially morally injurious experience* (PMIE) – where they experience, witness, or act in a way that contradicts their personal morals, values and beliefs.

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Moral Stressors and Outcomes

Farnsworth, 2017

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Moral Injury Outcomes

Professional
- Burnout
- Compassion Fatigue
- Disengagement
- Conflict with authority figures
- Abseentism
- Leaving the profession

Psychological
- PTSD
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Negative self-attributions
- Self-condemnation
- Self-punishment/harm
- Haunting memories or recollections

Emotional
- Guilt
- Anger/Hatred
- Shame
- Remorse
- Disgust
- Contempt
- Loss of pleasure
- Loss of joy
- Loss compassion
- Despair
- Cyncisism

Social
- Lack of trust
- Loss of faith in others
- Limiting social connection
- Loneliness/Isolation
- Avoiding intimacy
- Loss of identity/role;
- Loss of interest in hobbies/activities

Spiritual
- Questioning of one's sense of self
- Fractured world-belief
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Lack of forgiveness
- Lack of meaning and purpose
- Existential doubt
- Alienation from

Interactive Activity 1
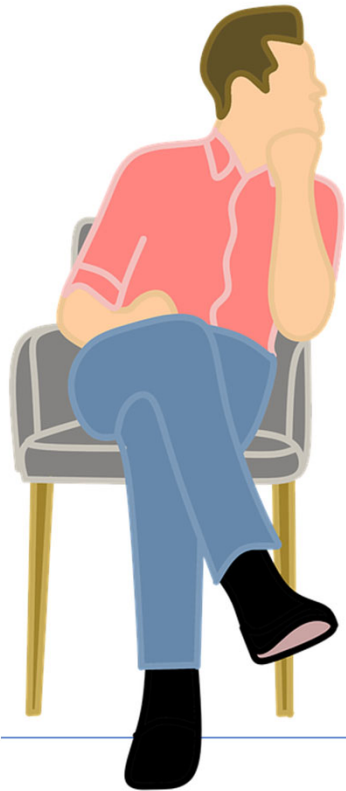
Can you identify symptoms of moral frustration or moral injury in yourself or others?

What symptoms may be most identifiable?

Which may be more difficult?

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Potentially Morally Injurious Events

- Witnessing, or failing to prevent harm or death,
- Witnessing suffering due to a lack of resources or capacity,
- Being blamed for uncontrollable situational factors leading to a poor outcome,
- Perceived lack of support from leadership,
- Cognitive rigidity,
- Failure to meet patient/complainant/community needs,
- Chronic exposure to societal problems,
- Unnatural or gruesome deaths,
- Lack of closure of an event,
- Offering futile care/aid to please family members or avoid complaints,
- Incidents involving children

Interactive Activity 2

In your career what experience(s) might you classify as potentially morally injurious?

What does the research say?

- Significant knowledge gap of empirical studies (relying on experience or observation) about MI in PSP

- Systematic search:
  - **No** empirical MI studies were found
  - Produced 30 articles on associated MI concepts

- Analysis revealed 4 dominant themes related to the moral toll on PSP
  1. Values
  2. Moral & Ethical Decision-Making
  3. Organizational Betrayal
  4. Spirituality
  5. ***Complex Grief (no empirical but theoretical articles)*

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Moral Injury & Emergency Management

In the community

- Disasters and largescale emergencies can intensify current societal problems.
- Additional psychological harm might not always come as the "disaster" but also the response or lack of response.

Emergency Management Professionals

- Emergency management carries a heavy moral responsibility.
- There may be value conflicts between of needs, resources, values, or priorities.
- Post-disaster emergency responders may not be offered support to process traumatic and morally injurious experiences.

Interactive Activity 3

What do you think is missing or needs to be considered regarding emergency management?

Mitigating Moral Suffering

While it may not be possible to completely remove moral suffering, some of the following strategies may help to mitigate the impact of PMIEs.

- Having strong empathic leadership which fosters a culture of ethical and moral behaviours.
- Having supportive teams and appreciation at all levels of the organization.
- Promoting prosocial feelings (i.e., altruism, compassion, personal sacrifice) during adversity.
- Cultivating personal and organizational meaning and purpose amid adversity.
- Ensuring clear on organizational mandates/policies to support wise discernment of ethical challenges and principled actions.
- Engaging regularly in crisis-focused communications that are timely, honest and clear regarding the PMIEs that providers will likely be exposed to when responding to a disaster.
- Preserving one's integrity, as well as the integrity of the team and others through the willingness to take courageous action(s) and take moral responsibility.
- Developing self-awareness and insight through deepening moral sensitivity.

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Summary

- Concepts of moral injury and distress may be particularly relevant to public safety and emergency management occupations.

- Moral suffering can range on a spectrum from moral frustration to moral injury.

- Potentially morally injurious experiences occur when a person is exposed to an event which violates perceived morals, values, and beliefs.

- Man-made or natural disasters may have unique PMIEs.

- Unresolved MI can cause a wide range of harm, distress, and disruption across personal and professional domains of wellbeing.

- More needs to be known about moral injury and moral distress; current military and healthcare data is insufficient to explain MI among public safety and emergency management personnel.

Iqewu#Jtqwr#hqt#Rctco gfkeu

Thursday March 25, 1300-1500 hours

If you are a paramedic in Alberta and you are interested in participating, send us an email!

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