

Fight for Freedom from Service-related Moral Injury

The Essential Role of Caregivers in
Helping Service-members find Forgiveness



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Agenda

- ❖ Introduce Moral Injury, its causes and consequences
- ❖ Discuss a Strategy to Facilitate Recovery from Moral Injury
- ❖ Explore what Caregivers can do to Support their Veterans
- ❖ Comment about Caregiver Self-care

Service-related Moral Injury



What is a moral injury (MI)?

- ❖ “Perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”
- Brett Litz, Ph.D., VA Boston Healthcare System, 2009
- ❖ “Disruption in an individual’s sense of personal morality and capacity to behave in a just manner”
- Kent Drescher, Ph.D., VA Palo Alto Healthcare System, 2011
- ❖ Inner conflict is “stress arising due to moral damage from carrying out or bearing witness to acts or failures to act that violate deeply held belief systems”
- *Combat and Operational Stress Control*, NTTP & MCRP, 2010

Potential Causes of MI

- ❖ Killing an Enemy Combatant
- ❖ Demise of a Battle Buddy
- ❖ Death or Injury of Civilians
- ❖ Injury or Death of others under one's Leadership or Care
- ❖ War-zone Atrocities (e.g., excessive use of violence, within-rank violence)
- ❖ Unnecessary Destruction of Civilian Property

(Drescher et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2014)

How prevalent is MI?

- ❖ According to the Mental Health Advisory Team, the prevalence of potentially morally injurious events is as follows.
 - ❖ insulting non-combatants (33%)
 - ❖ destroying private property (13.6%)
 - ❖ physically attacking a non-combatant when it was not necessary (6.1%)
 - ❖ modifying the rules of engagement to accomplish a mission (7.4%)
 - ❖ ignoring the rules of engage to accomplish a mission (4.3%)

(MHAT-V, 2008)

How prevalent is MI?

- ❖ In a survey of 143 active duty service members who were being treated for PTSD,
 - ❖ 22% reported *Moral Injury by Others*
 - ❖ 12% reported *Moral Injury by Self*
 - ❖ 30% reported *Traumatic Loss*

(Stein et al., 2012)

MI across every level of the Military Command Structure

Enlisted Ratings	Most likely to perpetrate or witness killing of enemy combatants, demise of a battle buddy, and exposure to severe human suffering (i.e., poverty, famine, etc.).
Non-commissioned Officers	Sense of duty exacerbates negative emotions when oneself or one's troops are rendered combat ineffective. Likelihood of repeated deployments.
Junior Officers	Performance-culture: Negotiate between managing the expectations of senior officers and expressing one's own moral fortitude.
Senior Officers	Despite the success/failure of an operation, senior officers' decisions have fall-out in terms of personnel who are injured or killed.
Support Personnel	Condemn themselves for the injury or death of service members in their professional care.

What are the possible consequences of sustaining a moral injury?

- ❖ Social and Behavioral Problems
 - ❖ Social Isolation, Interpersonal Aggression, Substance Abuse, Risk Taking
- ❖ Psychological Problems
 - ❖ Depression, Anxiety, Insomnia, PTSD
- ❖ Emotional Problems
 - ❖ Guilt, Shame, Anger, Disappointment, Regret

(Drescher et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2014)

What are the possible consequences of sustaining a moral injury?

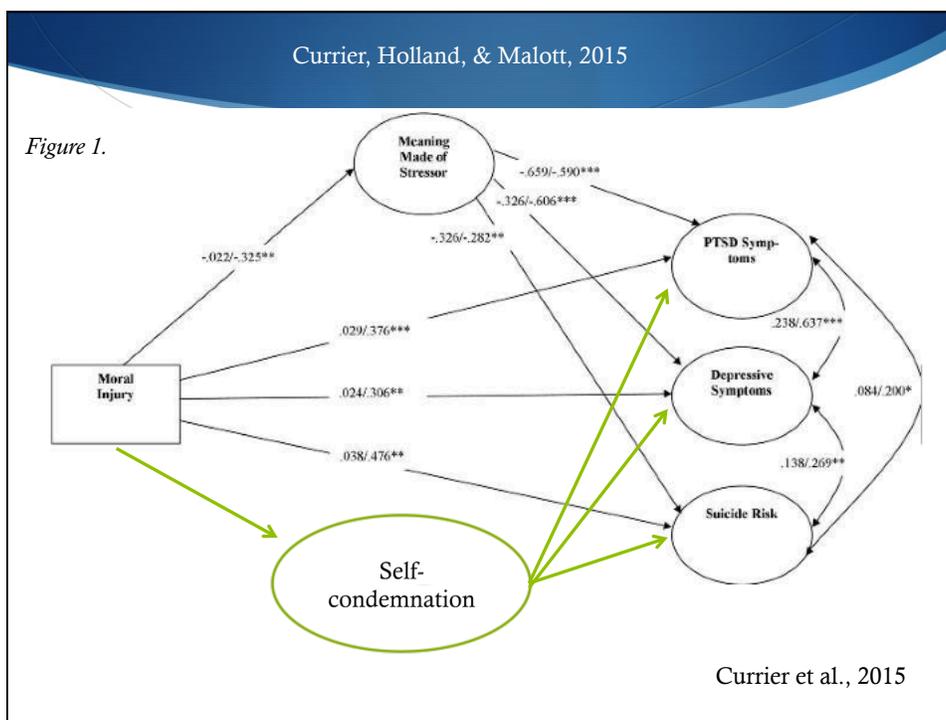
- ❖ Trust Difficulties
 - ❖ Conflicts with Romantic Partners, Children, Coworkers, etc.
- ❖ Spiritual/Existential Issues
 - ❖ Loss of Identity, Loss of Religious/Spiritual faith, Loss of Meaning or Purpose
- ❖ Self-destructive Behavior
 - ❖ Non-suicidal self-injury, Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors

(Drescher et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2014)

Moral Injury, Meaning Making, and Mental Health in Returning Veterans

Currier, Holland, & Malott, 2015

- ❖ Participants were Iraq and/or Afghanistan Veterans ($N=31$)
- ❖ Measures included exposure to morally injurious stressors, meaning making, and mental health outcomes (posttraumatic stress, depression, sociality).
- ❖ Data were analyzed using a statistical technique known as structural equation modeling.



Follow-up Question to Currier et al., 2015

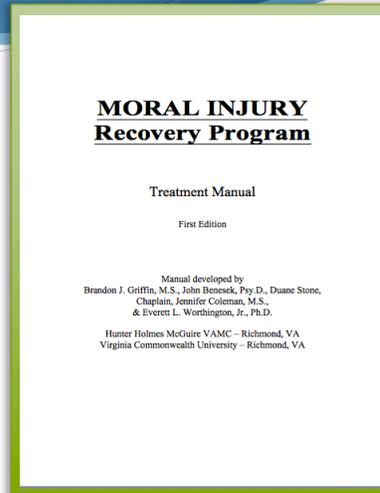
- ❖ What can we do to help our veterans resolve the challenges (e.g., difficulty making meaning, self-condemnation, grief, religious and spiritual struggle) that link experiencing a moral injury to psychological problems?

Facilitating Recovery from Moral Injury



Recovery Model

1. Introduction
2. Assessing Responsibility
3. Grief
4. Self-forgiveness
5. Acceptance
6. The “New Normal”



Introduction

- ❖ Psychoeducation about Moral Injury
- ❖ Personalize the Causes/Consequences of MI to each Veteran
 - ❖ Focus on the Present as much as the Past
- ❖ Encourage each Veteran to select One Event
 - ❖ If Veteran reports many events, they can train themselves by focusing on one event for the purpose of treatment and then apply what they learned to additional experiences.

Assessing Responsibility

- ❖ Process Experience to form an Accurate Blame Appraisal
- ❖ Acknowledge that Emotional Numbing is a short-term Protective Strategy that may lead to long-term Loss of Pleasure if perpetuated
- ❖ Normalize the Purpose of Negative Emotions (e.g., Guilt and Shame) and identify Specific Barriers to Healthy Resolution of each Veteran's Emotions
- ❖ Encourage Veteran to Reengage Negative Emotions by Making Amends

Break-out Session Exercise #1

- ❖ Description of the Event
- ❖ Evaluating Your Resources
- ❖ Identifying Collateral Damage
- ❖ Elements of a Good Confession
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Quotes
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Contract
- ❖ Rethinking Rumination
- ❖ Focusing on Present Choices
- ❖ Connecting to What's Important
- ❖ Evaluating Your Experience

Grief

- ❖ Loss will always be part of war. And, where there is loss, grief will also be.
- ❖ Includes the loss of others as well as intangible things
 - ❖ Loss of Battle Buddies, Innocent Civilians, etc.
 - ❖ Loss of Innocence, Loss of Control, Loss of Trust
 - ❖ Loss of Things You Once Enjoyed due to Physical Injury
- ❖ No Instructions for How to Grieve much of What is Lost in War

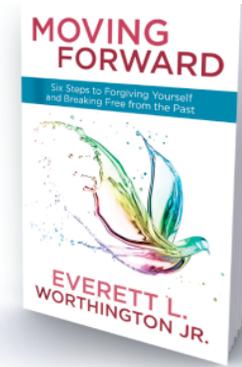
Forgiveness

- ❖ Forgiveness of others for those who condemn others for the wrongdoing that they themselves witnessed
- ❖ Forgiveness of self for those who condemn themselves for perpetrating or failing to prevent wrongdoing
- ❖ What Forgiveness is Not!

“I can't forgive myself . . . and the people who can forgive me are dead”
– *Ret. Marine Capt. Timothy Kudo*

Self-forgiveness, cont.

- ❖ Self-forgiveness intervention has been shown to alleviate guilt and shame and promote self-forgiveness.
- ❖ Self-forgiveness is associated with fewer psychological problems and destructive behaviors (e.g., suicide attempts, substance abuse), higher quality relationships, and less religious/spiritual struggle.



Break-out Session Exercise #2

- ❖ Description of the Event
- ❖ Evaluating Your Resources
- ❖ Identifying Collateral Damage
- ❖ Elements of a Good Confession
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Quotes
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Contract
- ❖ Rethinking Rumination
- ❖ Focusing on Present Choices
- ❖ Connecting to What's Important
- ❖ Evaluating Your Experience

Acceptance

- ❖ We cannot change the past but we can change how the past affects us.
- ❖ Resolve role conflict by integrating warrior identity with other important identities (e.g., parent, spouse, friend, employee, etc.).
- ❖ Stay focused on your present choices rather than your inability to control things (e.g., the government)

The “New Normal”

- ❖ Promote Moral Engagement by encouraging Values-based Living
- ❖ Have Veterans reflect on the Treatment Experience to Plan for the Future



Break-out Session Exercise #3

- ❖ Description of the Event
- ❖ Evaluating Your Resources
- ❖ Identifying Collateral Damage
- ❖ Elements of a Good Confession
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Quotes
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Contract
- ❖ Rethinking Rumination
- ❖ Focusing on Present Choices
- ❖ Connecting to What's Important
- ❖ Evaluating Your Experience

The Caregiver's Role

- ❖ Give Unconditional Acceptance
- ❖ Remind them that You've Got Their Back
- ❖ Provide a Reality Check to Ensure Values-based Living
- ❖ Have Gutsy Understanding
- ❖ Respect Veterans' Decisions to Disclose or Not Disclose
- ❖ Help Veterans to Forgive but Not Forget or Condone
- ❖ Be Cautiously Optimistic

Caregiver Self-care



Caregiver Self-care

- ❖ Moral Injury as a Mechanism of Vicarious Traumatization among Families of Military Service Members (Nash et al., 2013)
- ❖ Caregivers deal with their own responsibilities, attempt to do what's right, grieve, and have role conflicts. Perfect does not exist! Thus, self-forgiveness is associated with well-being among caregivers (Jacinto, 2010)

Questions?



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