

PTSD and Moral Injury in Veterans
A Call for a Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Response
RESOURCES

ABSTRACT

Litz, B. T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nash, W. T., Silva, C., & Maguen, S. (2009). **Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy.** Throughout history, warriors have been confronted with moral and ethical challenges and modern unconventional and guerilla wars amplify these challenges. Potentially morally injurious events, such as perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations may be deleterious in the long-term., emotionally, psychologically, behaviorally, spiritually, and socially (what we label as *moral injury*). Although there has been some research on the consequences of unnecessary acts of violence in war zones, the lasting impact of morally injurious experience in war remains chiefly unaddressed. To stimulate a critical examination of moral injury, we review the available literature, define terms, and offer a working conceptual framework and a set of intervention strategies designed to repair moral injury.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Drescher, K.D., Foy, D.W. Kelly, C., Leshner, A., Schutz, K. & Litz, B. (2011). **An exploration of the viability and usefulness of the construct of moral injury in war veterans.**

Traumatology, 17, 8-13. [doi:10.1177/1534765610395615](https://doi.org/10.1177/1534765610395615). It is widely recognized that, along with physical and psychological injuries, war profoundly affects veterans spiritually and morally, However research about the link between combat and changes in morality and spirituality is lacking. *Moral injury* is a construct that we have proposed to describe disruption in an individual's sense of personal morality and capacity to behave in a just manner. As a first step in construct validation, we asked a diverse group of health and religious professionals with many years of service to active duty warriors and veterans to provide commentary about moral injury. Respondents were given a semi structured interview and their responses were sorted. The transcripts were used to clarify the range of potentially and morally injurious experiences in war and the lasting sequelae of these experiences. There was strong support for the usefulness of the moral injury concept; however, respondents chiefly found our working definition to be inadequate.

Dombo, E.A., Gray, C., Early, B.P. (2013). **The Trauma of Moral Injury: Beyond the Battlefield.** *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*, 32, 197-210. This article explores moral injury, a concept from military mental health professionals, which refers to the emotional effects on soldiers of actions taken as part of their military obligations that violate the dictates of their moral compass (Boudreau, 2011; Shay 2011). This article will trace the history and current knowledge of moral injury and apply a social cognitive model of understand the concept (Litz et al., 2009) to vignettes from the authors' civilian clinical practice, in the hope of raising awareness within clinical social work and other mental health professions of the complexities of moral injury. By bringing the concept of moral injury into the mainstream social work arena, it is the authors' hope that clinicians will be able to distinguish it from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and understand the role of shame in the experience of moral injury in their own clients.

Gray, M.J., Schorr, Y., Nash, W., Lebowitz, L., Amidon, A., Lansing, A., et al., (in press). **Adaptive Disclosure: an open trial of a novel exposure-based intervention for service members with combat-related psychological stress injuries.** *Behavior Therapy*. doi: 10.1016/j.beth.2011.09.001. We evaluate the preliminary effectiveness of a novel intervention that was developed to address combat stress injuries in active-duty military personnel. Adaptive disclosure (AD) is relatively brief to accommodate the busy schedules of active-duty service members while training for future deployments. Further AD take into account unique aspects of the phenomenology of military service in war in order to address difficulties such as moral injury and traumatic loss that may not receive adequate and explicit attention by conventional treatments that primarily address fear-inducing life-threatening experiences and sequelae. In this program development and evaluation open trial, 44 marines received AD while in garrison. It was well tolerated and, despite the brief treatment duration, promoted significant reductions in PTSD, depression, and negative posttraumatic appraisals, and was also associated with increases in posttraumatic growth.

FEATURED WEBSITE: US Department of Veterans' Affairs. *PTSD: National Center for PTSD.* <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>

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