PTSD vs. moral injury: a scoping review

Stéphanie A.H. Bélanger, CD, PhD Associate Scientific Director, CIMVHR; Heidi Cramm, Queen’s; Kari Fletcher, St-Thomas; Jean-Simon Demers, PhD Cand. University of Ottawa

While Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has garnered much research attention, the concept of moral injury has recently been increasingly raised. This scoping review was undertaken to explore how the literature conceptualizes the relation between PTSD and moral injury.

Moral injury

“...the emotional and spiritual impact of participating in, witnessing, and/or being victimized by actions and behaviors which violate a service member’s core moral values and behavioral expectations of self or others. Moral injury almost always pivots with the dimension of time: moral codes evolve alongside identities, and transitions inform perspectives that form new conclusions about old events.”

(Syracuse University, The Moral Injury Project, n.d.)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

“a history of exposures to a traumatic event that produces symptoms that can be found in the four symptom clusters that include intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity”

(American Psychological Association, 2013)

Distinctions

Data Sources: 2-26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MORAL INJURY</th>
<th>PTSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dimensional</td>
<td>Taxonomy based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No threshold must be met</td>
<td>Threshold must be met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a diagnosis</td>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016)

Results: What the literature shows

1. Difficulty in Distinguishing

Overlapping definitions and differences around whether they are separate, sequential, or simultaneous; mean there is a lack of clarity in defining the concepts of PTSD and moral injury.

2. Protective Factors and Vulnerabilities

Mechanisms of acquisition, expression of the condition, neuropathological changes, and the role of spirituality can create protective factors and vulnerabilities.

3. Detection and Response

Distinguishing between PTSD and moral injury remains problematic given the current state of the research.

The Research Process

Identified: 3547 references identified as potential sources

Screened: 61 studies proceeded to full-text screening

Included: 37 studies included in full data extraction and analysis

Data Source: 1

Data Sources: 27-37
REFERENCES


AUTHOR INFORMATION
Stéphanie A.H. Bélanger, CD, PhD, Associate Scientific Director, CIMVHR
Heidi Cramm, Queen’s University
Kari Fletcher, St-Thomas
Jean-Simon Demers, PhD Candidate at University of Ottawa
Correspondence should be addressed to Stéphanie A.H. Bélanger at: Stephanie.Belanger@rmc.ca

COMPETING INTERESTS
None declared.

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