

# **Conceptual, Contextual, and Ethical Dimensions in the Study of Moral Injury**

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# Overview of Presentation

- Ongoing study: “Moral Injury in War Veterans”
- Thoughts about conceptualization of MI
- US cultural contexts & replication of MI
- Ethical considerations in research involving military veterans

# Purpose of the Study

To examine dimensions of Operation Enduring Freedom-Operation Iraqi Freedom-Operation New Dawn (OEF-OIF-OND) veterans' experience of "moral injury"—how veterans' experiences of complex and morally fraught circumstances in military service in time of war affect their emotional, mental, and spiritual health.

# Study Design and Methods

- Exploratory, mixed methods, descriptive
- Initial recruitment via listserv of SU students who are veterans, then snowball sampling (target  $N = 50-75$ )
- Participants  $\geq 18$ , deployed to OEF-OIF-OND in any role, any branch of service
- Completion of paper/pencil scales, followed by semi-structured interview (and debriefing)

# Measurement

- Baseline Information Questionnaire (Johnson, 2014)
- Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory-2 (DRRI-2) (Vogt et al., 2012)
- Moral Injury Event Scale (MIES) (Nash et al., 2013)
- Moral Injury Questionnaire-Military (MIQ-M) (Currier et al., 2013)
- Personality Characteristics Questionnaire (aka Inventory of Callous-Unemotional Traits, ICU) (Frick, 2004)
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist-Military (PCL-M) (Weathers et al., 1991)
- Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) (Derogatis, 1975)
- Substance Use Questionnaire (aka CAGE-Adapted to Include Drugs, CAGE-AID) (Ewing 1984)

# Study Goals

- Further refine the parameters of MI: etiological factors, psychological mechanisms, and emotional, cognitive and behavioral impacts
- Explore how moral injury is different from and/or related to PTSD
- Gather data useful to operationalization and measurement of MI in future studies
- Lay groundwork in preparation for more comprehensive quantitative study to follow current study

# Grounding the Conceptualization

- Focus group, interviews in 2013-14
- Review of literature on MI, on war
- Veterans' writings (non-fiction, fiction, other)  
—on current wars, previous wars
- Documentation by journalists, government and academic reports & white papers, NGO reports, etc.
- Systems theory, interpersonal neurobiology

# **Whose actions, whose moral injury?**

While moral injury may appear to be situated within a given individual, in fact the etiology of such an injury is complex, arising from a convergence of the many personalities, decisions, and actions, sociocultural and political forces playing out in a particular historical moment through a particular human being.



# “Determinants” of Moral Injury

- “Symptoms”—a human and humane response
- Experiential etiology of MI
- “Mechanisms” of MI
- Risk and protective factors
- Emergent themes

# Swords into ploughshares?

- US sociocultural, ideological contexts and the replication of moral injury across conflicts and across generations—can we interrupt the processes?
- Ethical considerations in research involving military veterans—aims and applications
- Elements of healing—individual, societal

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