

[MALLOY] - *Compromise Conscience: Towards Managing Moral Injuries in Public Safety Personnel*

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Dr. R. Nicholas Carleton, PhD., is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Regina and Scientific Director for the Canadian Institute of Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT). Carleton is a registered clinical psychologist in the province of Saskatchewan with extensive experience in providing evidence-based treatments for PSP, primarily for PTSD, but has worked with patients reporting problematic moral injuries.

Dr. Gregory Anderson PhD., is the Dean of Science at Thompson Rivers University. Dr. Anderson's personal research interests include occupational stress, fitness and physiology of physically demanding occupations, presumptive legislation, and the building of personal resilience and coping strategies for improved mental health in public safety personnel. He has been actively involved in occupational physiology, working primarily with police and law enforcement agencies.

Dr. Rosemary [Rose] Ricciardelli, Ph.D., is a Professor of Sociology, the Coordinator for Criminology, and Co-Coordinator for Police Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Elected to the Royal Society of Canada, she is also the Vice Chair of the ARC-NAC of the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT). Her research is centered on evolving understandings of gender, vulnerabilities, risk, and experiences and issues within different facets of the criminal justice system.

Dr. Suzette Brémault-Phillips, PhD. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy, and Director of HiMARC (Heroes in Mind Advocacy and Research Consortium) at the University of Alberta. She conducts research in rehabilitation medicine, mental and spiritual well-being and health, ageing and implementation of best practices. Current research relates to resilience and growth among military members, veterans, public safety personnel, and their families, civilians and trauma-affected populations; decision-making capacity assessments; and managing responsive behaviours.

Dr. Liana Lentz, PhD., is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Western University and the Canadian Institute of Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT). She brings with her the lived experience of 15 years of municipal policing as well as an academic background in injury prevention and public health. Her research has focused on physical and psychological injury in public safety providers.

Dr. Lorraine Smith-Macdonald, PhD., is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Alberta in the Heros in Mind Advocacy and Research Consortium (HiMARC). Her clinical/academic career has focused on the intersectionality between mental and spiritual health and wellbeing within military and Veteran populations, with a specialization in moral injury, spiritual fitness, posttraumatic growth and military-to-civilian transition. She is also experienced conducting qualitative research and program evaluation.

Priority Research Area: Neuroscience, Mental Health and Addiction

Relevant PSP Population(s):

This particular project focuses on PSP broadly defined.

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What is the issue? Moral Injury (MI) can occur when a person has a PMIE - experiences or witnesses something, or acts in a way that contradicts their personal values and beliefs. If the contradictory behaviour(s) are inconsistent with external moral, social, or legal expectations, this leads to;

- 1) cognitive, emotional and existential distress,
- 2) mental health challenges - including symptoms consistent with one or more posttraumatic stress injuries,
- 3) problematic levels of emotions (e.g., shame, guilt, anger) and,
- 4) compromises to other areas of well-being (e.g., relationship breakdowns, spiritual or existential suffering).

Unfortunately, intervention research to manage MI is limited.

What was the aim of the study?

The current study is designed to accomplish three tasks:

1. Conduct a scoping review to examine the existing empirical research related to ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, moral injury, and potentially morally injurious experiences among PSP.
2. To Identify which elements, if any, of the PMIE PSP encounter are shared among PSP, which elements differ between the across PSP groups and to understand the mechanism(s) by which such elements are injurious.
3. To engage PSP and collaboratively develop a didactic training program consisting of a combination of psychoeducational concepts and exercises introducing the concepts of MI and moral decision-making to a PSP cohort, which we hope will be a helpful step towards proactive and responsive solutions for reducing MI symptoms.

How was the study conducted?

1. A scoping review was conducted to examine what empirical research existed on MI and PSP.
2. Focus groups will be used to assess the extent of knowledge on MI and to identify PMIEs specific to each of the PSP groups:
3. Psychoeducational content will be developed using the information gained from the scoping review, focus groups and consultation with experts in MI to inform a proactive and responsive solution for PSP experiencing MI.

What did the study find? While we aimed to conduct a literature review exploring empirical research examining the occurrence of MI among PSP, the MI literature on PSP populations was primarily theoretical leaving an empirical knowledge gap. Presumably, PSP suffer MI and moral distress at a greater prevalence and frequency and have greater impairment compared to the general population. There is evidence, for instance, that police officers encounter moral dilemmas in situations of use of

force. Unfortunately, the effects or morally injurious experiences on PSP are not understood. No research examining ethical experiences of PSP were found.

We expect the results of the focus groups and engagement with stakeholders to help fill a critical knowledge gap by outlining the experiences of MI and MIE in PSP, foreseeably, to inform programs that can help to mitigate MI symptoms. Additionally, we expect to identify elements shared and unique among PSP.

What are the implications of this study? E.g. for policy development, health care practice, etc.

PSP are frequently faced with moral/ethical dilemmas that appear associated with mental health challenges, and a sense of organizational betrayal. The psychological distress commonly associated with PTSI may impact different domains of PSP well-being. Additional support to effectively address the PMIE experienced by PSP through their occupational duties. Results from the PSP focus groups will seek to develop a more nuanced understanding of PSP specific PMIEs and MI outcomes. Once identified, specific tools can be created to effectively intervene after a PMIE and stimulate further development for MI treatment and preventative education.

What are the key messages?

1. Anecdotal evidence indicates PSP may be harmed by the moral dimensions of their work. Empirical research regarding MI in PSP is virtually nonexistent and little research exists regarding associated constructs (e.g., ethical decision-making).
2. Research is required to identify the MI elements of PSP work, the frequency and prevalence of PMIEs, and how PMIE exposures affects PSP mental health and wellbeing.
3. MI appears to perpetuate and intensify mental health challenges for military and healthcare personnel; accordingly, effectively addressing MI may also help to recalcitrant PTSD symptoms and mitigate complex PTSIs in PSP.

Provide a list of potential target audiences for this research:

- Researchers
- Policy makers
- PSP organizations
- Frontline PSP
- Mental health clinicians and healthcare professionals
- Stakeholders
- Employee assistance groups