

Experiences of potentially morally injurious events in Canadian public safety personnel

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Acknowledgments

Disclaimer

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Agenda



Background and context

Defining moral injury and why it is relevant to PSP



Objectives and methods

Study goals and procedures



Findings

Detailed study findings



Conclusions

Implications and conclusions of this research



Next steps

Managing moral injury in the workplace

Background and context

What is moral injury?



Moral injury is the psychological, social and spiritual impact of events involving betrayal or transgression of one's own deeply held moral beliefs and values occurring in high stakes situations, known as potentially morally injurious events (PMIEs).

Litz et. al (2009); Shay (1994)

Background and context

What are potentially morally injurious events (PMIEs)?

- PMIEs are often divided into two main groups:
 - Moral transgressions that involve people doing or failing to do something (deliberately or unwittingly)
 - Being exposed directly or indirectly to another's transgressions (e.g., bearing witness to grave inhumanity)



Background and context

Moral injury in occupational settings



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- During COVID-19, frontline workers sounded alarm about moral injury
- Moral injury also been observed as relevant in public safety
- Research increased during COVID-19, but remains nascent

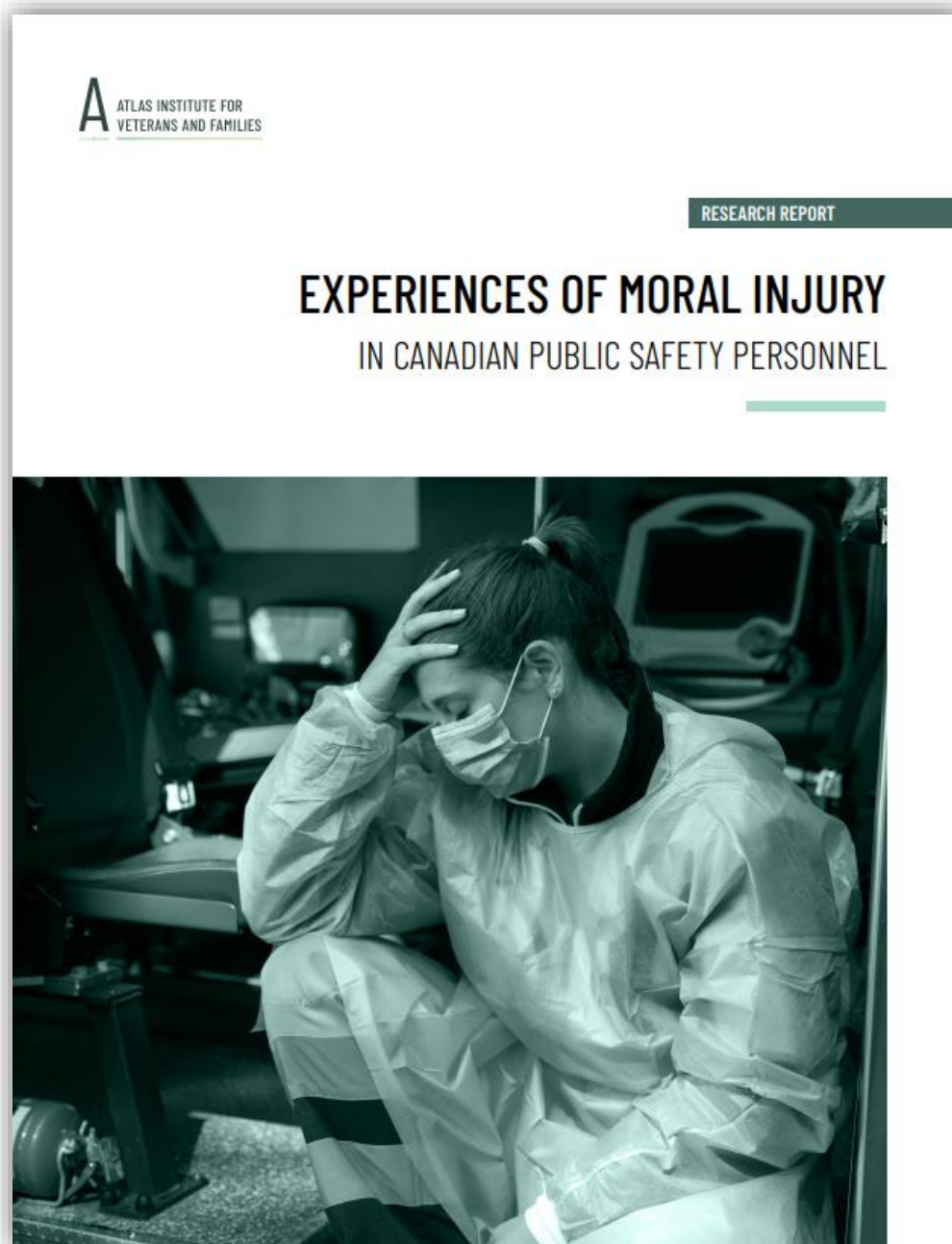


Intro

Background and context

Why is moral injury relevant in public safety?

- Moral and ethical challenges are inherent in public safety occupations
 - Such events may be difficult to reconcile and may lead to moral injury
- PSP may be exposed to:
 - Incidents involving children
 - Situations leading to patient injury or death
 - Corruption or leadership betrayals
 - Providing futile care



Our New Report

Available on our website:

<https://atlasveterans.ca/knowledge-hub/moral-injury/experiences-of-moral-injury-in-canadian-public-safety-personnel/>

Rodrigues, S., Mercier, J.-M., Nannarone, M., McCall, A., Farrell, S., Sedge, P., Wilson, J., Nashef, K., Perkins, M., & Hosseiny, F. (2022). *Experiences of Moral Injury in Canadian Public Safety Personnel*. Ottawa, ON: Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families.



Methods

Data collection and analysis

**One-on-one
interviews**

**38
participants**

Paramedics

**Emergency call-taker
or dispatcher**

Logistics technicians

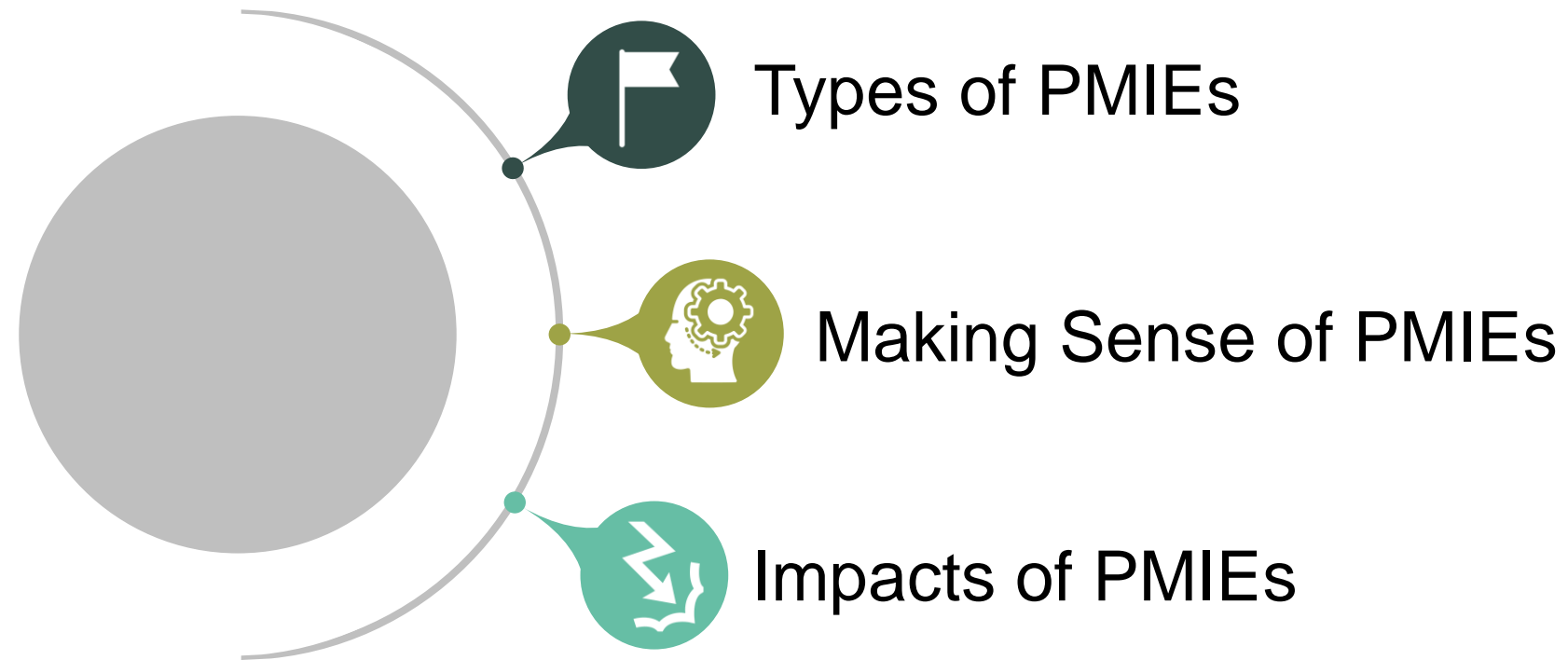
Management

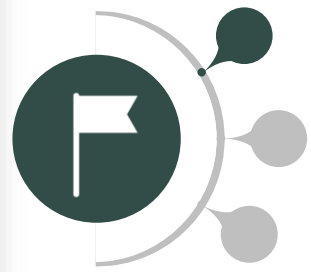


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Types of PMIEs



Macro-level

- Arose due to issues with the broader health care system

Meso-level

- Caused by the organizational climate or culture

Micro-level

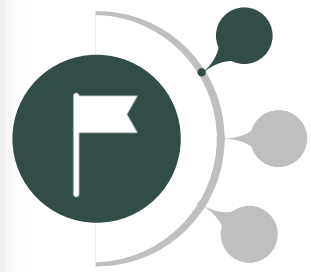
- Related to nature of work itself



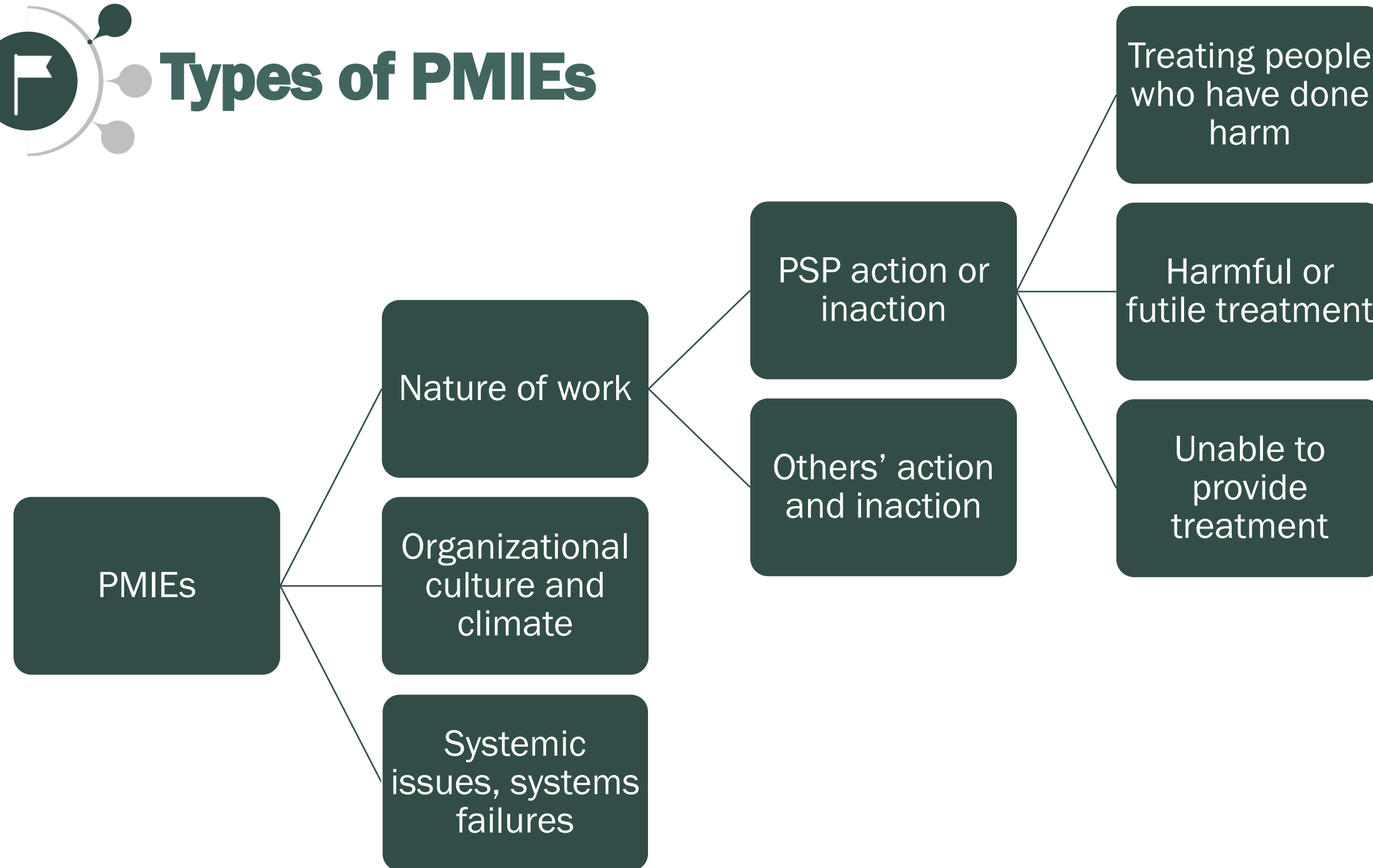
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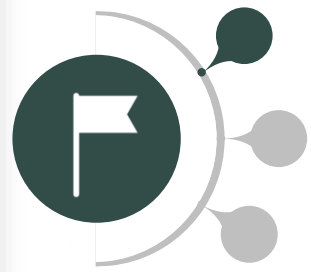
Types of PMIEs



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Types of PMIEs

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Treating people who have done harm

One time getting called [...] to care for someone who was a pedophile. [...] At the time, my daughter was probably three or four years old. And I'm having to deal with this guy that—like, **every fibre of my being was just, like, “I want you to rot in hell.”**

Pam (paramedic)

”

“

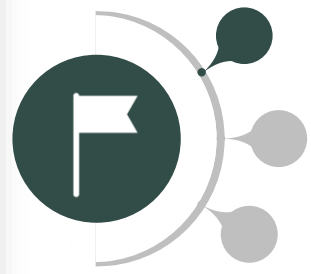
Harmful or futile treatment

[...] By the time we got [to the hospital], he was starting to get really agitated; he was very uncomfortable, he wanted out. [...] He was screaming in pain. [...] And that's really difficult to deal with when **you're called to, you know, help make a patient feel better and I made his whole situation worse.** [...] That's one example where I found was morally wrong.

Brenda (paramedic)

”





Types of PMIEs

Unable to provide
treatment

I was given directions from a physician to stop resuscitation on someone. I didn't feel we should stop. **I felt that there was still a chance.** So, [that was a] morally difficult situation where I'm being told to do one thing and I don't feel it's the appropriate decision.

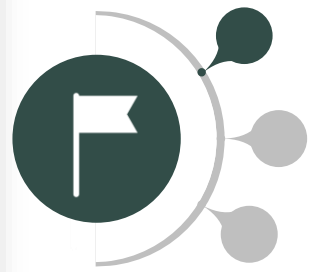
Jack (paramedic)



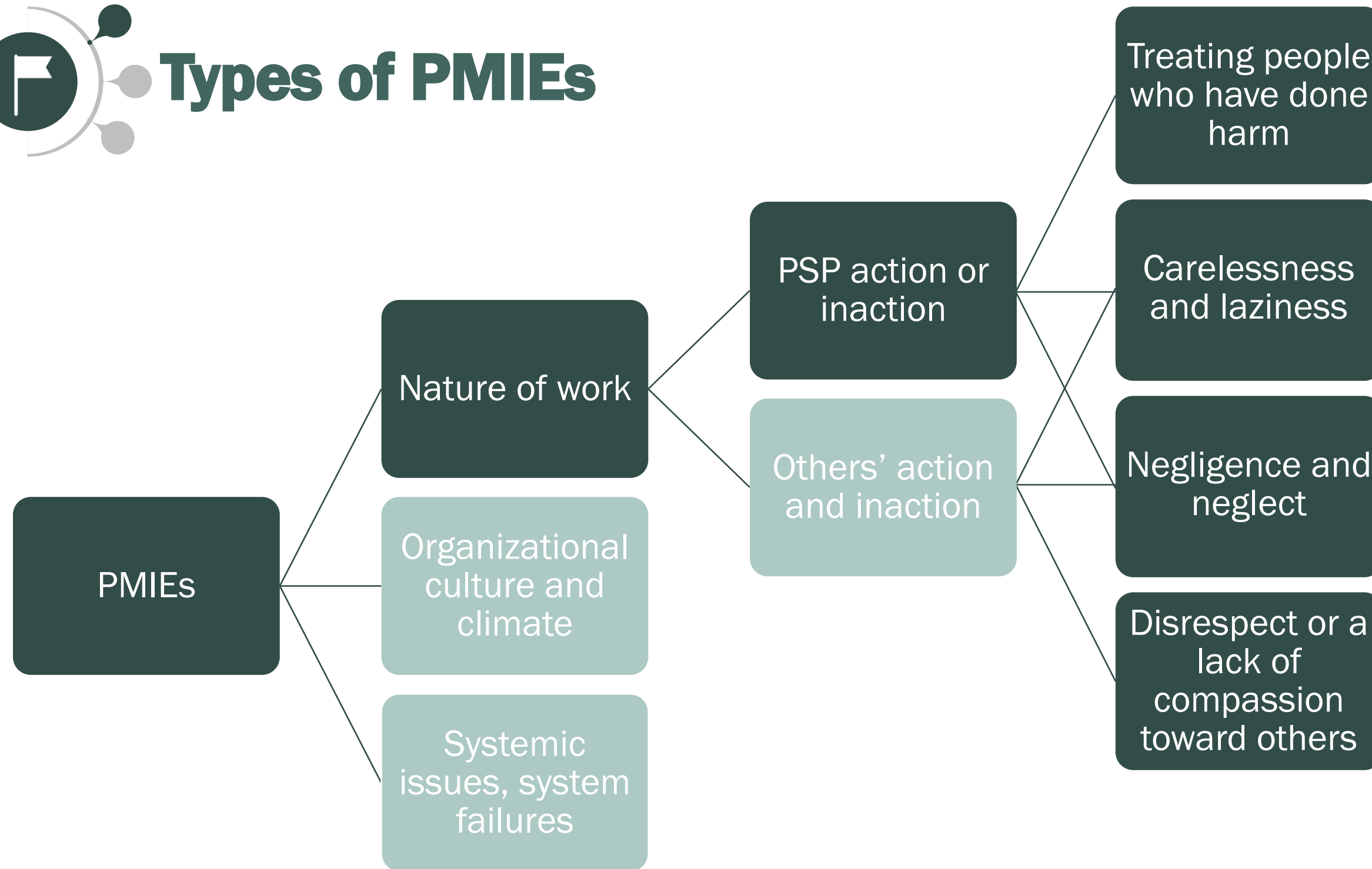
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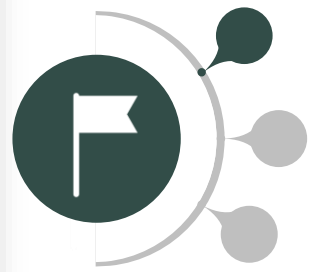
Types of PMIEs



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Types of PMIEs

Negligence or neglect

He was hurting. [...] So by the end of the call, I told [my partner] “We should at least put him on the stretcher, at least let him lay down, you know? You know, why didn’t you medicate? We should do something for him.” And as much as I want to jump in and do something [...] it was his call, so I can suggest as much as I want but at the end of the day it’s up to him.

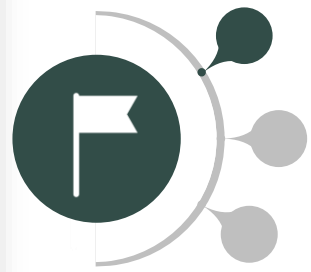
Julien (paramedic)

Negligence or neglect

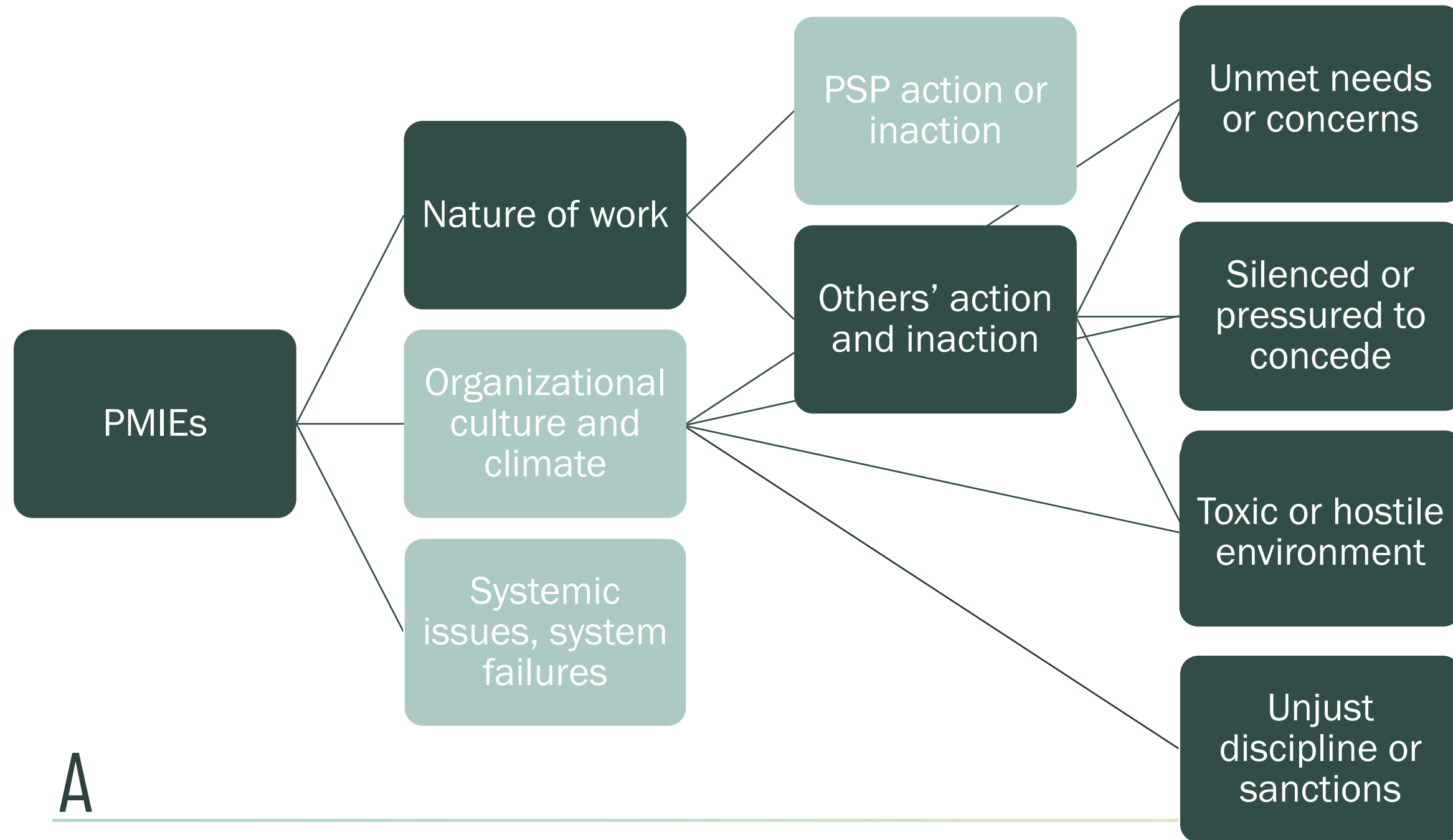
[...] He was a higher medical authority and I **followed his lead, and it was an adverse outcome** [for that patient]. So that was very, very hard on me.

Henry (paramedic)





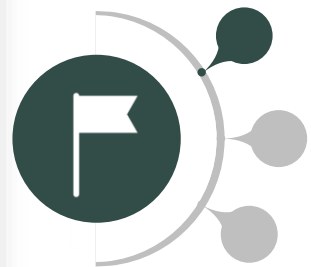
Types of PMIEs



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Types of PMIEs

Unmet needs or concerns

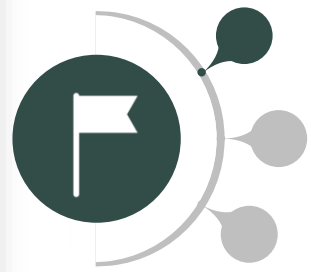
So basically, if [communications] calls you, it's, like, "Okay, [...] we need coverage here. We need you to go here." It's, like, "Well, hang on a second. Like, we need a few minutes to, you know, get our headspace back." And then they jump right [to] "Well, are you refusing to do the call?" Like, it becomes an adversary instantly. So, you have no other option but to go to that call. Now you're dragging the last trauma into this one [...].

Oliver (paramedic)

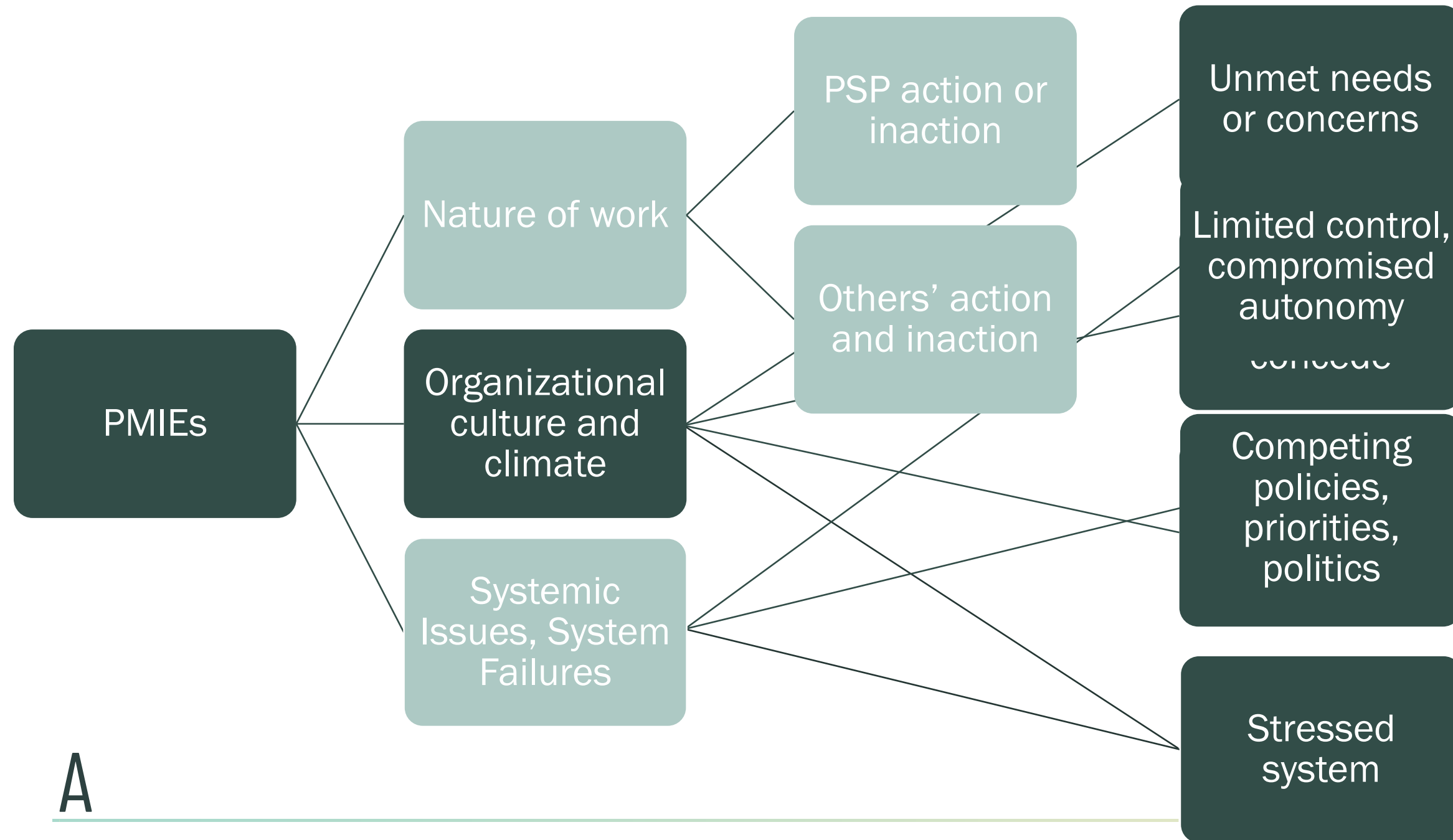
Silenced or pressure to concede

"Don't worry, someone will talk to him. But [...] do not repeat this to anyone. This would reflect very badly on the Service, and maybe yourself." [...] I could not believe my ears. [...] And I don't believe in being [...] made to feel like something bad could happen to you if you say the truth about an experience you've had.

Camila (communications)



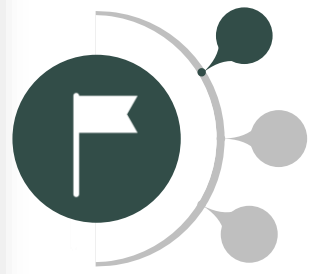
Types of PMIEs



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Types of PMIEs

PSP as stop-gap measure

We're not social workers. We're not therapists, we're not—that's not our job. My job is cardiac arrest, respiratory, cancer, pain control, stuff like that. That's my job and you get put in these situations where you literally have—you know, it's not your job but, you know, there's nobody else to call so this is what you're doing.

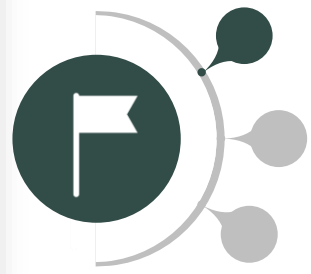
Shirley (paramedic)



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Types of PMIEs

Under-resourced system

There's a political pressure there to have ambulances – and I say ambulances, because that's how they see us, not as humans – put back on the road as soon as possible. And it doesn't matter really what's happened; the goal is to finish a call and get back out there. [...] It's a political pressure that we've been playing with for a very long time, that we're understaffed, that we are overused, that we're overworked. And that pressure comes down to our [superiors] to get us back on the road, and that's the goal.

Thea (paramedic)





Making sense of PMIEs

PSP explanations of moral and ethical concerns:

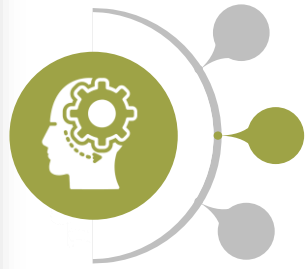
- Compromised choice
- Broke their trust in leadership or the organization
- Generated inner conflict



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Making sense of PMIEs

Had no choice

I felt not comfortable whatsoever because there was, like, there's no benefit. It was just best to kind of leave him be and let family have their wish and let him have his final wish but, unfortunately, **we were just stuck between a rock and a hard place**, and we just had to proceed.

Grant (paramedic)



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Making sense of PMIEs

Inner conflict

I am basically being forced to [decide]: do I want to potentially risk my income and risk my job [by doing] good patient care [and] maybe prevent somebody from [...] dying because of a medical issue? **That's the choice I get to make frequently. Like, that's not a good position to be in.**

Howard (paramedic)



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Making sense of PMIEs

Trust is broken

You think that they're going to be a good parent and do the right thing, but they're not. The organization is not here for us, to support us. [...] Eventually, I had to drop it. At that point, I flipped from, "Oh, your supervisors know what's best, what's the right thing," to, "**** you guys." [That experience] represented a big turning point of my morals and my view of how an organization that says, "We're going to take care of you. We care about your mental health. We care about your wellbeing. We care about your health and safety. We care about you coming forward." Blah, blah, blah, blah. It's not true. [...]."

Thea (paramedic)



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Impacts of PMIEs

Emotional

anger
frustration
helplessness
resignation

Physical and mental health

anxiety
cognitive problems

Professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal

social life
self-concept
worldview



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Impacts of PMIEs

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Anger and frustration

I can sympathize with these people who are in complete crisis who have no help or support and often end up in the revolving door of the system, which is go to the hospital, get booted out and then call us again the next day and do the same thing over and over again. [...] **It's hard not to feel frustrated when – not at them but at the system.**

Rick (communications official)

”



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Impacts of PMIEs

Helplessness

You know that every minute counts when somebody's [vital signs absent], and you're like, "Why are we responding for this [non-emergency] call?" And there's no power for us or supervisor to say, "Okay, I'm going to take liberty to downgrade this call to bump this one out," [... That's] for liability reasons. [...] **We have no power. [Put] protocol in place, and just follow it.**

Sam (communications official)



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Impacts of PMIEs

Resignation

[...] when you're talking about moral injury, I feel like, if anything, it's one of those, like, **long-term erosions of, like, your willingness to stand up for things**, absolutely. Especially in this kind of workplace [...] you have to weigh the risks and the benefits for some of the decisions that you make, not only on yourself but on your colleagues and on the patients. And, after a while, I will admit, you just stop caring.

Anthony (communications official)



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Impacts of PMIEs

Withdrawal from social life

I dropped a bunch of extra things that I had done, volunteer things that I had been active in. [...] I will bail on plans with friends. And **that has cost me friendships**, because I've flaked too many times because I just – I couldn't deal.

Thea (paramedic)



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Impacts of PMIEs

Self-concept

“ My biggest complaint about [my] profession, is the impact it has on me as a person. [...] I definitely feel shut off and I feel like I assume the worst in people, and I’m always looking for what’s wrong in people. [...] For me, it’s a moral problem [because] **it’s degraded aspects of me that are human, that connect with other people.** ”

Pam (paramedic)



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Impacts of PMIEs

Self-concept

I have never been as angry as I am in the last probably year and a half. It's not my personality at all. [...] I don't like it. **It's not who I am at the core.**

Audrey (leadership)



Impacts of PMIEs

Self-concept

I didn't like who I was becoming and what the system was turning me into. In order for me to live and function in that system, **I had to break my morals, and I had to not care in order to survive. And I was terrified about who I was becoming [...]. It was my soul that is broken** and that is damaged [...] from the difficult stuff that I see and that I deal with. But I think I was just also broken by the system and I was just done.

Brenda (paramedic)



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Conclusions

PMIEs are part of the PSP experience



PMIEs are often a product of multiple, intersecting factors



Meso- and macro-level PMIEs are more difficult to accept because they are unexpected



- Conclusions
- Findings
- Methods
- Intro

Next steps:
Recognizing MI and managing PMIEs
in the workplace

Recognizing moral injury

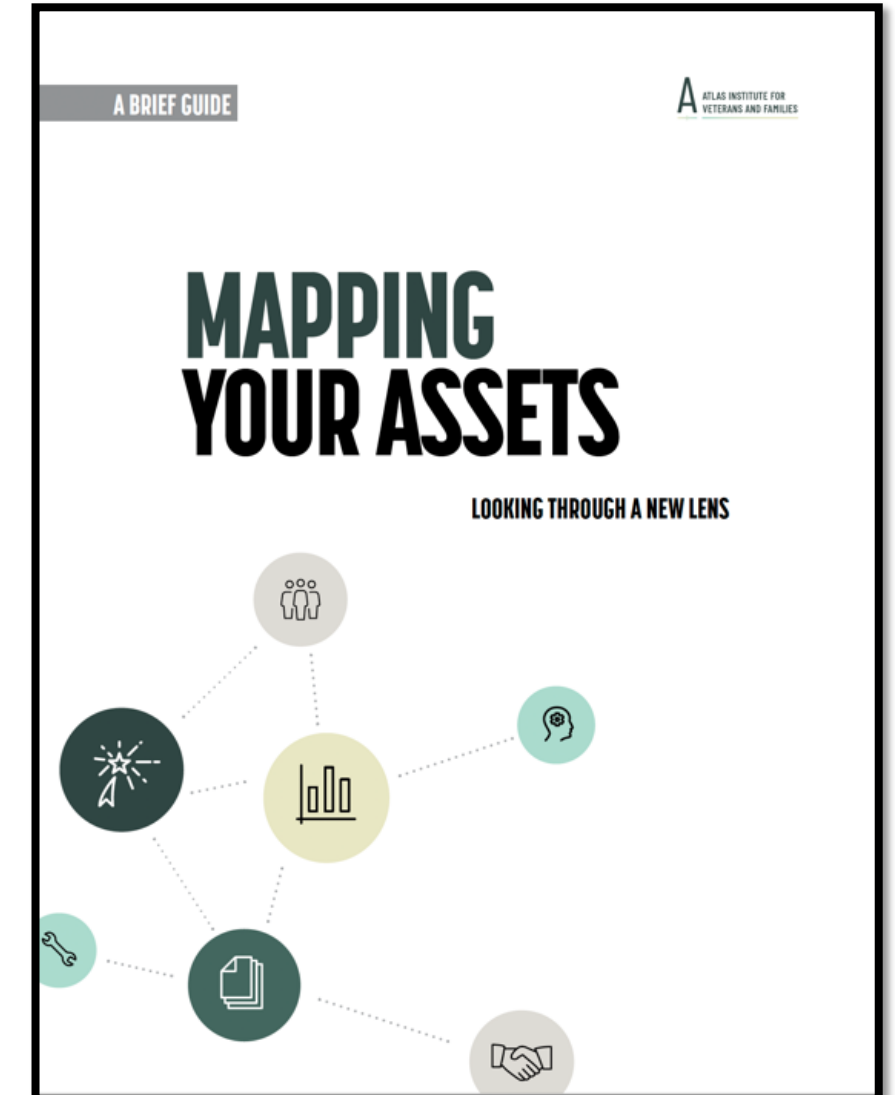
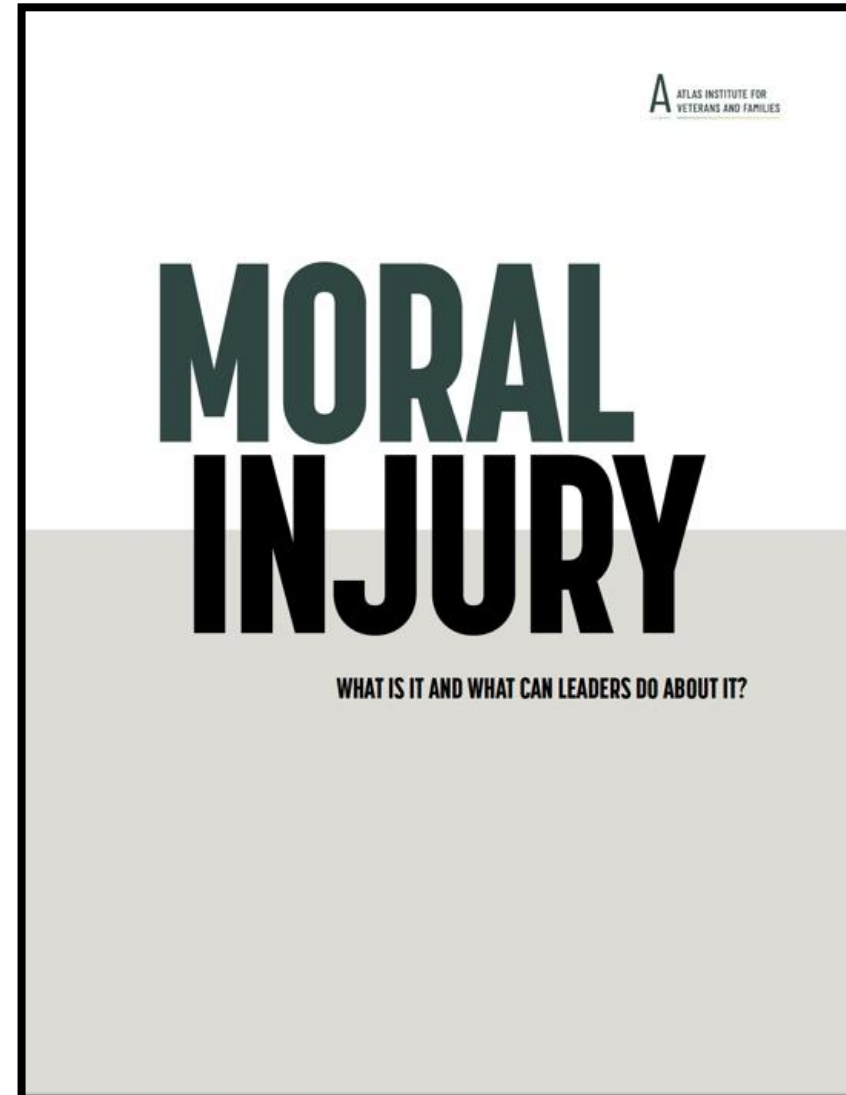
- Not all PMIEs result in moral injury
- Be attentive to behavioural signs or changes:
 - Isolation or withdrawal
 - Lack of purposeful behaviour
 - Anger or aggression
- Create a safe space to discuss PMIEs or moral injury
 - Acknowledge the moral stresses or difficulties inherent in the work
 - Show patience and compassion



Managing PMIEs in the workplace

- Organization-wide and system-level approach
 - Requires responses at the organization, team, and individual levels, and from communities and governments
- Social support
 - Protective factor that can reduce symptoms of mental health conditions
 - Promote self-care, personal meaning-making, social connection, non-judgment
- Peer support
 - Effective protective factor following trauma exposure

Resources from the Atlas Institute



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Stay connected

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RESEARCH REPORT

EXPERIENCES OF MORAL INJURY IN CANADIAN PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL

