

Moral Injury Among People Experiencing Homelessness

David Araujo, House of Hope
Maureen Sumner, House of Hope
Megan Smith, House of Hope

NATIONAL
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Plan for today

Introductions

(Mini) story circle

Defining moral injury

What this looks like in the homeless community

Breakout groups: diving more deeply into story circle themes

Coming back together: Report out and thinking about next steps

Introductions

Show of hands:

- How many people here have lived experience with homelessness?
- How many people do front-line work with people experiencing homelessness?
(As an outreach worker, peer specialist, medical provider, etc)

A little about us:

- David
- Maureen
- Megan

Story circle

Tell us about a time someone helped you make sense of something you were struggling with

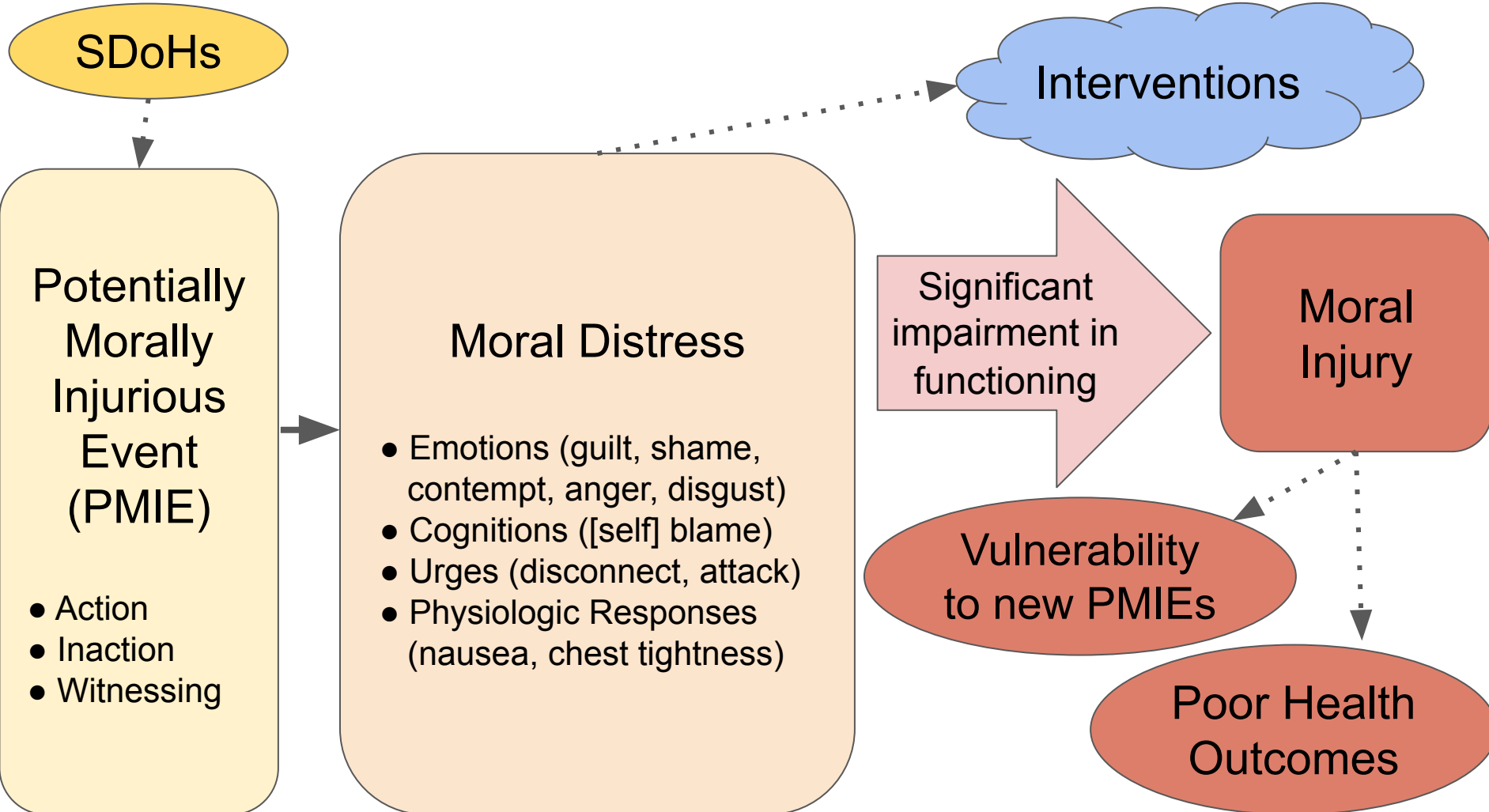
Guidelines:

- Please keep your story to two minutes or less (we'll run a timer)
- You are welcome to pass and we can come back to you (or not)
- Define the terms however you'd like
- Try to be present and listen, rather than thinking of what you'll say
- No responses necessary (though minimal encouragers and validations welcome!)

Defining moral injury

“Lasting psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations”

(Litz et al., 2009, p. 697 as cited in McEwen et al., 2021, p. 303)



SDoHs

Potentially
Morally
Injurious
Event
(PMIE)

- Action
- Inaction
- Witnessing

Moral Distress

- Emotions (guilt, shame, contempt, anger, disgust)
- Cognitions ([self] blame)
- Urges (disconnect, attack)
- Physiologic Responses (nausea, chest tightness)

Interventions

Significant
impairment in
functioning

Moral
Injury

Vulnerability
to new PMIEs

Poor Health
Outcomes

Social determinants of health and moral injury

Individual-level factors

- Race, ethnicity
- Gender, sex, sexual orientation
- Class, socioeconomic status
- Disability

Environmental factors

- Housing / homelessness
- Justice involvement
- Health care access
- Discrimination / -isms



Moral injury compared with PTSD

- Similar to PTSD, exposure to a preceding event is necessary but not determinant
 - Trauma → PTSD
 - PMIE → moral injury
- Is moral injury a separate clinical syndrome from PTSD?
- The diagnosis of PTSD requires direct or indirect exposure to a threat to life or sexual violence to qualify as a Criterion A event – this does not include all PMIEs
- Historical framing of PTSD as related to victimization

Defining moral injury clinically

Moral Injury Outcomes Scale

- Questions about the event itself
- Ranking of symptoms (copied here)
- Inventory of psychosocial functioning

Keeping this worst event in mind, please read each of these statements and circle one of the numbers to the right to indicate how much you would agree with the statement in the past month.

<i>In the past month, how strongly would you agree with the following statements:</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Agree or Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1. I blame myself.	0	1	2	3	4
2. I have lost faith in humanity.	0	1	2	3	4
3. People would hate me if they really knew me.	0	1	2	3	4
4. I have trouble seeing goodness in others.	0	1	2	3	4
5. People don't deserve second chances.	0	1	2	3	4
6. I am disgusted by what happened.	0	1	2	3	4
7. I feel like I don't deserve a good life.	0	1	2	3	4
8. I keep myself from having success.	0	1	2	3	4
9. There is no higher power.	0	1	2	3	4
10. I lost trust in others.	0	1	2	3	4
11. I am angry all the time.	0	1	2	3	4
12. I am not the good person I thought I was.	0	1	2	3	4
13. I have lost pride in myself.	0	1	2	3	4
14. I cannot be honest with other people.	0	1	2	3	4

Examples of moral injury in various contexts

Soldiers

- A soldier is given an order with which they morally disagree but which they are obligated to follow

Healthcare workers

- A provider must adhere to a policy which harms patients

People experiencing homelessness

- **Interestingly, there's no literature (that we could find) about this**

Some examples we've heard

A person who gave a peer fentanyl is deeply upset because he learned that person fatally overdosed

A woman and her partner are both distressed because he encouraged her and she consented to do sex work to get the money they need to have a place to stay

A man feels deep shame at having “abandoned” his family, and feels stuck in homelessness as a result

A person feels very guilty for not allowing their peers to stay in their new apartment because doing so would put them at risk of eviction

What have you seen, heard, or experienced?

How this is talked about

By people experiencing homelessness

It isn't

Non-judgment

Mutual aid

“It took me out of my character” or “It kept me up at night”

By providers

It isn't

Judgment

Victim / perpetrator dichotomy

Jargon

What else have you seen and heard?

What do we have to learn?

How do folks experiencing homelessness self-define their morals and values?

What potentially morally injurious events do people experiencing homelessness commonly face?

How do folks talk with others about these experiences?

What would be supportive in processing them?

What do folks say about surviving homelessness in hindsight?

Interventions

Public Policy Interventions

- Safe, permanent housing
- Safe injection/harm reduction sites
- Decriminalization

Clinical and social interventions

- [Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Moral Injury \(ACT-MI\)](#)
- [Adaptive disclosure](#)

What challenges exist for creating interventions for moral injury in people experiencing homelessness?

Incorporating this with people experiencing homelessness

We have so much more to learn...

Demonstrating awareness of moral injury in the context of homelessness

Asking folks what would be beneficial for them

Avoiding a victim / perpetrator dichotomy

Acknowledging the role of structural forces in choice / decision-making

Co-developing language with folks with lived experience

...Can we create a practice → research → practice cycle grounded in folks' lived experiences?

Breakout groups

Please divide into three groups. Try to include a range of roles and geographic areas in each group.

Discuss the following questions for each scenario:

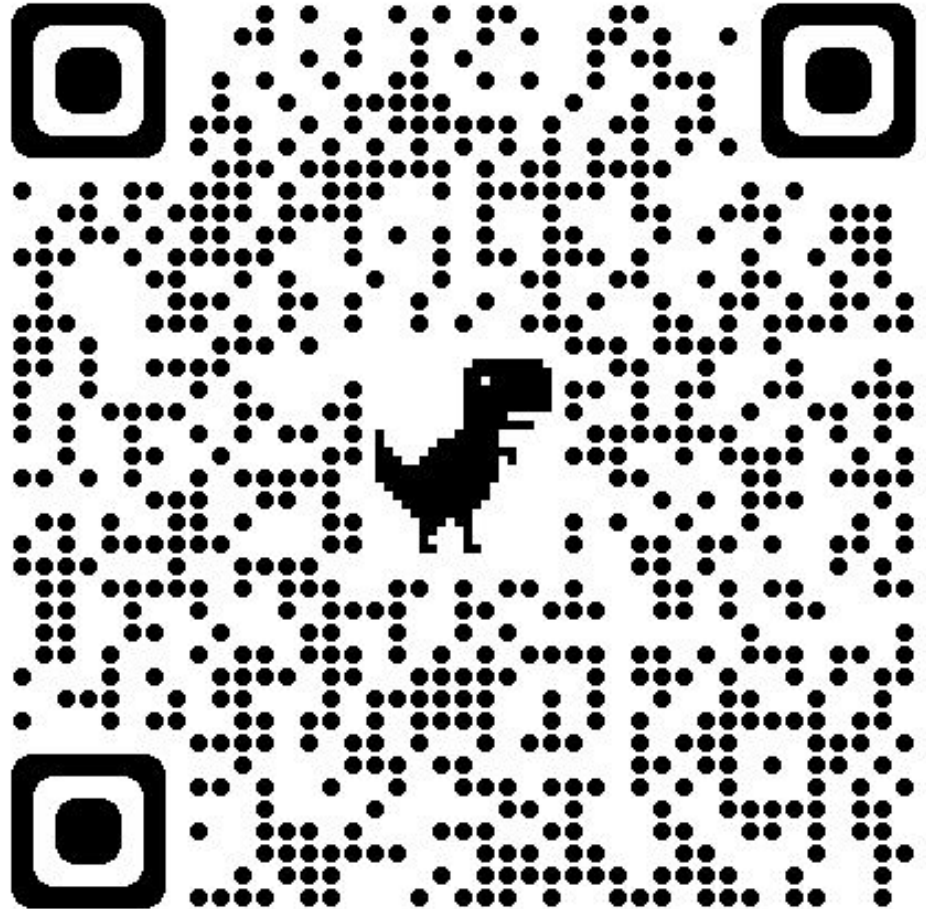
- What personal value(s) do you think the person feels that they violated?
- How did the person exercise agency / choice-making? How were their options constrained by social or structural factors?
- If you were in this person's position, what would be helpful for you to hear from a support person? What would be unhelpful?
- Imagine you are this person two years later, reflecting back on this experience. What might you say about it in hindsight?

Report back and debrief

What helpful language did you think about?

How did you think about this experience in hindsight?

If you're interested in continuing this conversation, please add your name (and any notes) using the QR code. Our slides are also linked from this code.



Thank you!

Megan: megan_c_smith@brown.edu

Maureen: maureensumner37@gmail.com

David: dba41173@hotmail.com