

# Webinar

Organized by the Australasian Services Care Network

Moderator: Robert Lippiatt

## Speakers:

Dr. Carl Castro

Dr. Hazel Atuel

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## Understanding Moral Injury from a Character Domain Perspective **RESPECT**

In this presentation Dr. Carl Castro and Dr. Hazel Atuel from the University of Southern California will introduce (1) a character dimension of moral injury and (2) a dual pathway model of moral injury reflecting the clinical and character domains. This framework advances a broader theoretical foundation of moral injury that has wider applicability to the varieties of human experience, and is not defined by and does not necessarily reflect clinical impairments.

To (re)-see this webinar:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1LCnQgoHdk&ab\\_channel=VeteranTransitionandWellbeingWebinarSeries](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1LCnQgoHdk&ab_channel=VeteranTransitionandWellbeingWebinarSeries)

To read the scientific paper:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351209379\\_Understanding\\_moral\\_injury\\_from\\_a\\_character\\_domain\\_perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351209379_Understanding_moral_injury_from_a_character_domain_perspective)

Moral injury is a tug of war between who the person considers the real self to be and who the person has become in the aftermath of the moral failure.

### **PSTD and moral injury defined and differentiated:**

PTSD (illness domain) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event like combat, etc. Moral Injury (character domain) is a failure to adhere to a virtue or value that results in needless suffering or death that threatens one's character and identity.

### **Ways a moral injury may arise:**

1. When a person becomes aware of aspects of themselves, which they had not considered or thought possible. This may include the capacity to do nasty things, or to observe nasty things without feeling a need to intervene.
2. Feeling such pressure from a hierarchical organization that they do or observe things they know to be wrong.
3. Belief that the world has changed or been revealed in such a way that the person no longer feels at home in society so having an identity that no longer fits.

### **Illness and character domains:**

The Illness domain comprises the cognitive, emotional, and physiological reactions that result from experiencing the events. Disruptions in the Illness Domain can result in PTSD, depression, and other mental and behavioral health issues. The Character domain comprises the character and identity that are impacted by the event. Disruptions in character can range from compromised flaw, and breakdown. Disruption in identity can range from speckled, spoiled, disgraced/broken. The domains are separate, yet interact to result in the behavior that results from experiencing the event.

### **Implications for assessment and interventions:**

One can suffer from a moral injury without having a mental illness and vice versa. One can suffer from a mental illness without having a moral injury. The time course for onset differs between a mental illness and a moral injury. An illness onset will be quicker than a character change onset. Strong character ensures ethical behaviors, thus protecting against moral injury. Traditional psychotherapies such as PE, CPT, EMDR, etc. will not effectively treat disruptions in the character domain, even though the symptoms might be similar to those arise from the illness domain.