



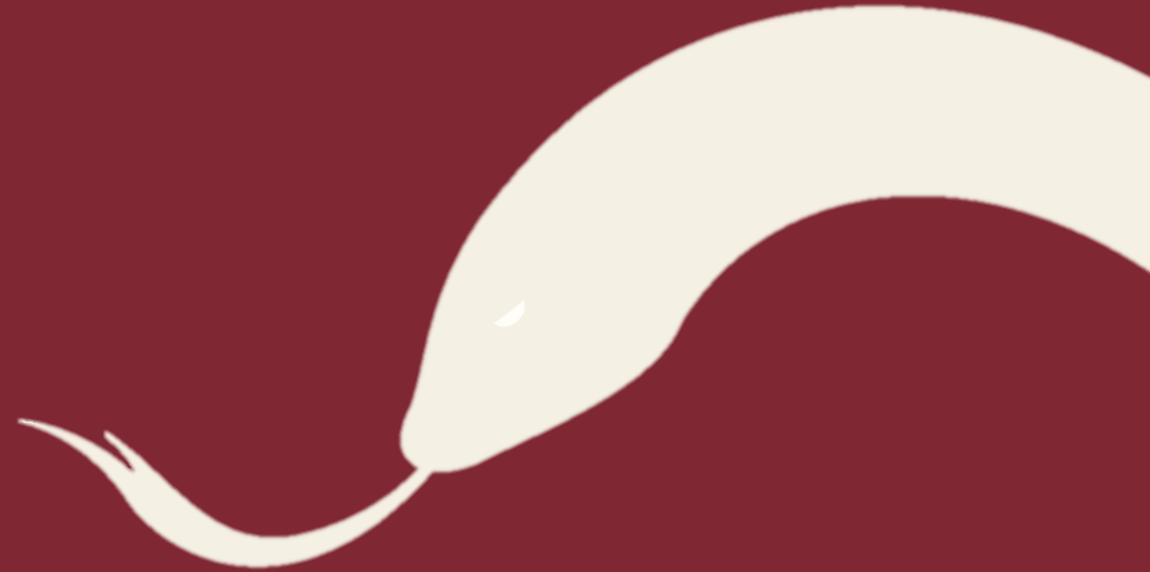
Moral injury and ethics education

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Outline

- ▷ *Moral injury: Psychological, moral and social*
- ▷ *Interventions for moral injury (beyond clinical treatment)*



Moral injury:
Psychological, moral and social

Moral injury

The psychological, spiritual and social **impact** of perpetrating, failing to prevent and/or witnessing **situations** that **violate** deeply held moral beliefs and expectations

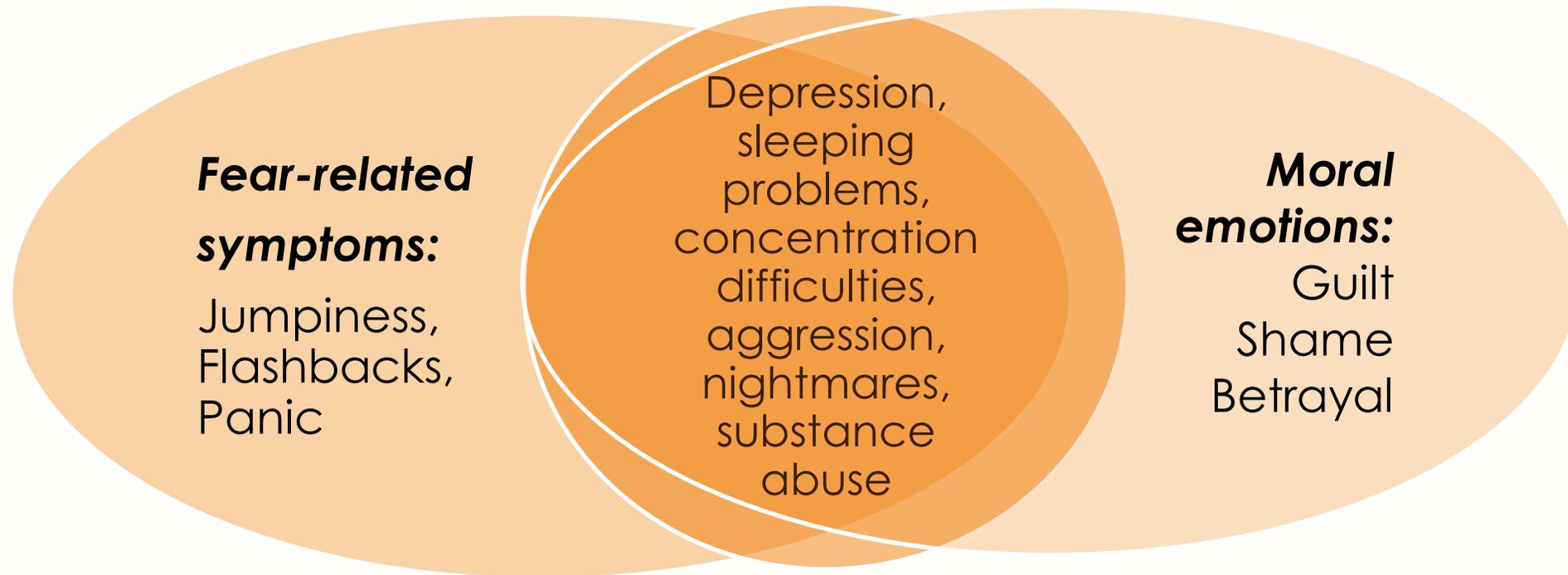
(cf. Litz et al., 2009)

(simplified, more complex in reality!)

	Dominant PTSD-models	Moral Injury-concept
Event	(Life)threat <i>Sense of safety is violated</i>	Moral transgression <i>Sense of a just and meaningful world is violated</i>
Key responses	Fear-related responses (intrusive memories, hyperarousal)	Moral emotions (guilt, shame, anger)
(Perceived) rol in event	Victim or witness	Victim, witness, responsible agent
Approach to blame of self or others	Resulting from 'distorted cognitions' (DSM 5), thus need to be challenged	Possibly appropriate, thus (self)forgiveness may be needed

PTSD

Moral injury

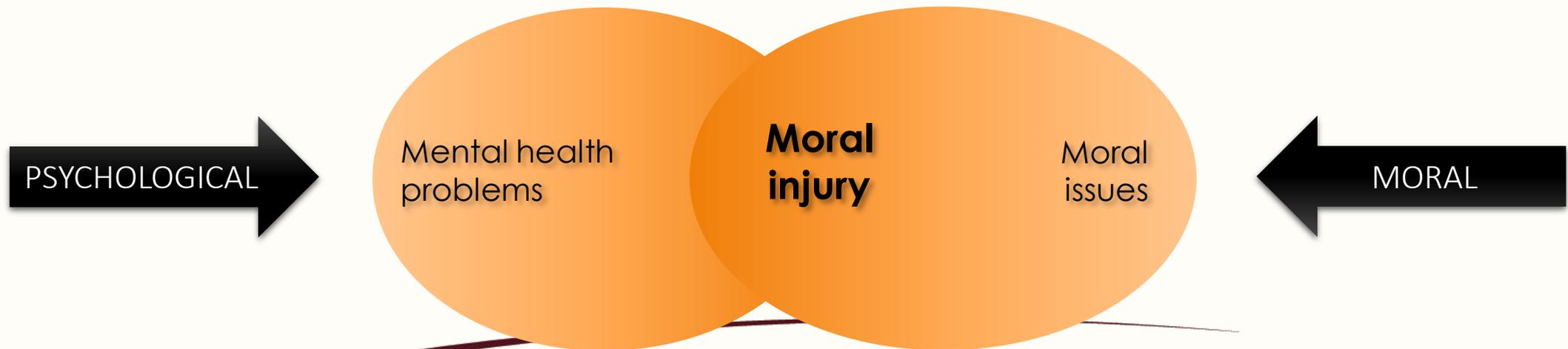


(Figure in Molendijk 2021)

Moral injury

The psychological, spiritual and social **impact**
of perpetrating, failing to prevent and/or witnessing **situations**
that **violate** deeply held moral beliefs and expectations

(cf. Litz et al., 2009)



SOCIAL



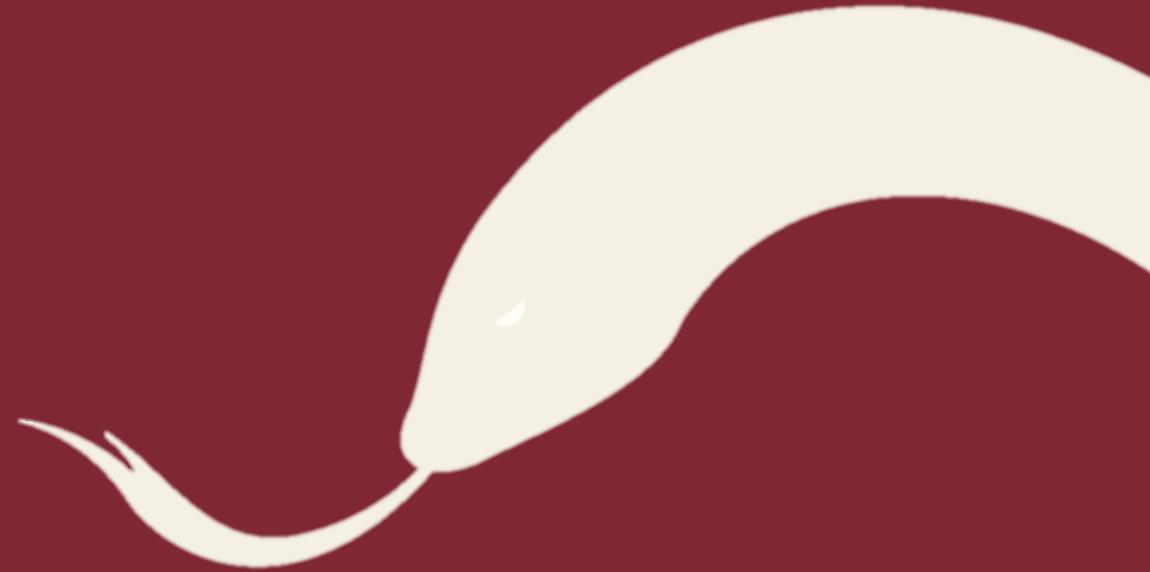
Mental health problems

Moral injury

Moral issues

PSYCHOLOGICAL

MORAL



Interventions for moral injury (beyond clinical treatment)

General preventive measures

Expectation management, i.a.:

- Beware of possible adverse effects of ‘resilience training’ (positive psychology-focus). Well-intentioned focus on positive reappraisal of hardships and on justifying military actions = denial of legitimate ethical struggles + risk of soldier feeling abandoned/betrayed in hindsight
- Be honest and realistic

Peer-support and psychosocial support , o.a.:

- Do not: direct intensive debriefing. Do: allow letting off steam (diffusion)
- Do not: judge (neither condemnation *nor rationalization*). Do: take seriously people’s own judgments.

(see also Van Baarle & Molendijk 2021; Greenberg e.a., 2020; Williamson e.a., 2020)

Psychotherapy & pastoral counseling

- Guilt is common reason for drop-out of treatment (Finlay, 2015; Gnaulati, 2019)
- Guilt is one of the most common residual symptoms following regular treatment for PTSD. Especially the belief that the person's actions during the traumatic event were simply unjustifiable often remain problematic for sufferers (Larsen et al., 2019)
- **Psychological** treatment (modules) for moral injury: i.a. Adaptive Disclosure (Litz et al., 2015), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Moral Injury (ACT-MI) (Evans et al., 2020)
- Pastoral counselling by chaplains: by definition focused on **moral issues**, incl. meaning-making, making amends and finding (self) forgiveness, sometimes on **social activities**, e.g. collective rituals (Molendijk et al. 2022)

Ethics education

We all know words like ‘values’, ‘moral beliefs’, ‘dilemma’.
But what do they actually *mean*?

Ethics education helps to:

- recognize the moral dimension of situation (also in hindsight)
- make morally well-considered decisions (or understand why you did what you did in hindsight)
- verbalize decisions made and their impact, have the words to make sense of them, to others and self
- account for decisions made, take appropriate responsibility, to others and self

(Lang, 2018; van Baarle et al, 2017)

As part of psycho-education

What are values? Where do they come from?

Compass of deeply held beliefs and expectations about “what’s right”

Socially shaped by family, society, unit, organization, and so on

What is a moral dilemma? How can impossible choices cause guilt and shame?

Irreconcilable conflict: forced transgression of values

The fact you had no other choice does not take away the fact that something fundamental was violated, that you were involved in ‘evil’

Why do people transgress moral boundaries?

Temporary moral blindness/’numbness’

Sometimes because of the very fact that situations have moral impact

What is ‘moral injury’?

Impact of situations like these, because:

Violation of deeply held beliefs and expectations that bind you to your family, society, unit, organization, and so on

As part of dilemma training

If possible, connect to scenario training, because:

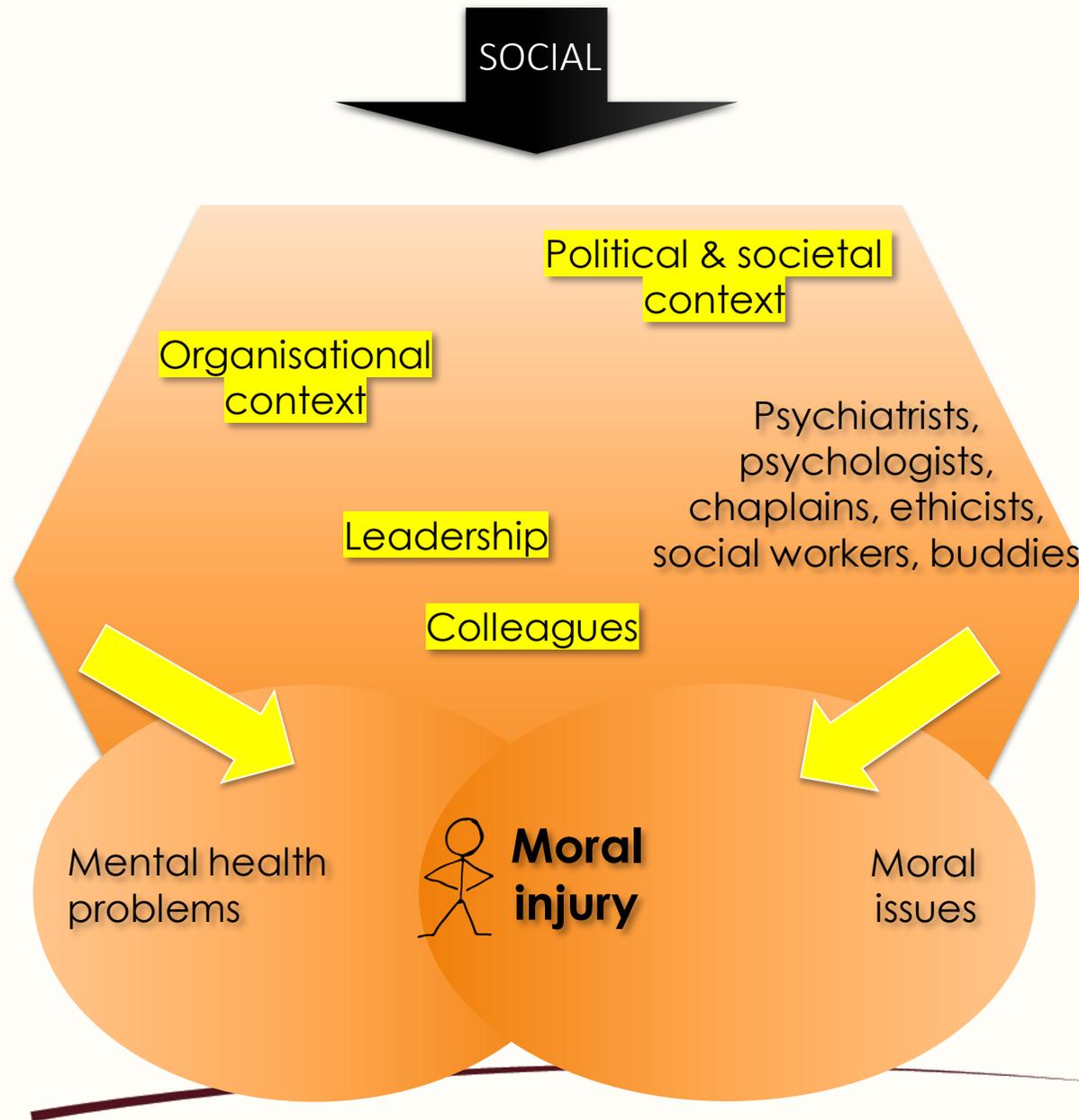
- realistic cases (not abstract hypothetical dilemmas)
- experience-based (not 'dilemmas as brainteasers')
- includes rol of stress and emotions in decision-making (not just cognition)

(Thompson & Jetly, 2014; Molendijk 2021)





- Decision-making before operations (just war criteria, etc)
- Societal narratives about missions (whodunits versus tragedies)
- Investment in 'just culture'/ethical climate



- Collective purification and reintegration rituals for returned soldiers
- Reconciliation, mediation efforts
- Return trips to area of deployment
- Etc etc



Thank you

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