

**“It’s not recovery, it’s discovery”
– A phenomenological
exploration of moral injury
experienced by service users in
forensic psychiatric settings**

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Overview



Introduction



Primary Aims



Preliminary
findings



Implications
for practice



Next steps

Introduction

Over the 20th century the debate regarding rehabilitation was rife...

- 'Nothing works' vs 'What works' debate.
- Do those convicted of offences possess morality?
- If yes - what happens to such individuals when they are victim to, witness, or act in ways that contradict their morals and values?
 - Moral injury?

Aims

The evidence base regarding moral injury in forensic populations has been growing (Maddocks, 2021; McGowan, 2022; Roth et al., 2022; Steen, 2023).

However:

- Knowledge is limited in relation to its impact upon identity, wellbeing, and subsequent rehabilitation.
- Research and definitions of moral injury have focused upon clinical domains (symptomology) arguably losing sight of the foundations of morality which centre upon character, virtues, and ethics.



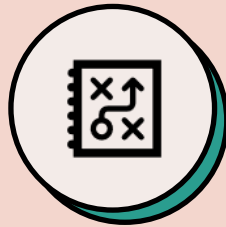
Explore

The concept of moral injury in service users detained in forensic settings



Explore

The key features of moral injury as experienced by such individuals



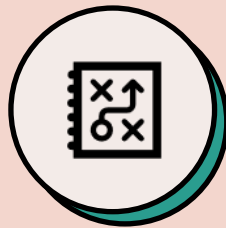
Identify

The impact of moral injury on wellbeing and identity



Explore

The process of coping with and recovery from moral injury



Identify

Implications for forensic practice

Method

- Multi-perspective IPA study including service users and professionals
- Conducted across medium and low secure inpatient forensic wards
- 10-15 participants split across two groups
- Semi-structured interviews



Preliminary findings

The hidden trajectory towards moral injury

It doesn't start with them it starts outside of them

Typical moral codes can't be applied here

Harmful parts aren't welcome

There is no middle ground in moral injury

Mutual avoidance maintains a fragmented identity

A desperate search for meaning

Insight is a double-edged sword

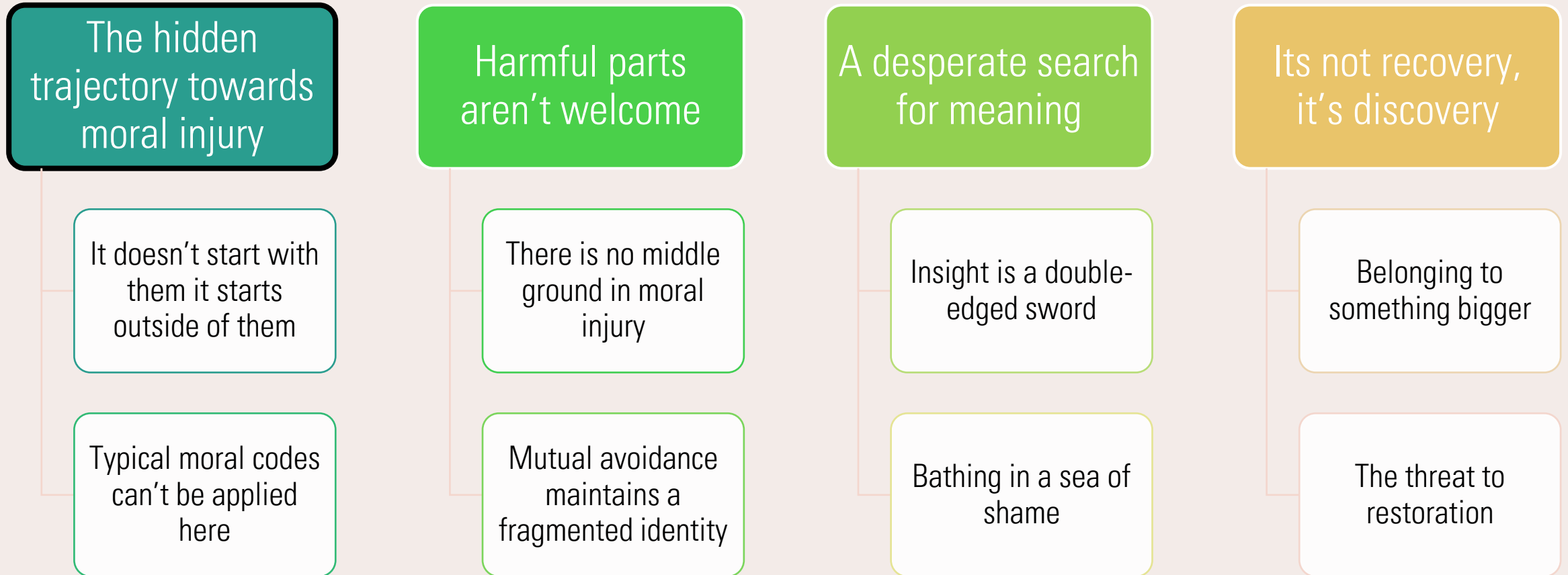
Bathing in a sea of shame

It's not recovery, it's discovery

Belonging to something bigger

The threat to restoration

Preliminary findings



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Subtheme 1a: It doesn't start with them, it starts outside of them

For all our patients they grew up in a real dog eat dog world environment and it's a case of if you don't go out and cease something from the world then you will receive nothing and you will suffer as a result...and yeah I think them feeling disillusioned even from a very young age...they're growing up and they're seeing that their parents are kind of otherised from society then by the time they start secondary school I think or, or, or, schooling in general I think sometimes there is an attitude of oh this is the rosy world that everyone lives in a story book in and I'm not in that and then there's an otherism then that sort of then starts to build into them as they grow up [Stephen, pg.4 – 6].

”

“

Subtheme 1b: Typical moral codes can't be applied here

It's an underground that there's more stuff going on on the ward than we will ever get to know about, but the guys have to live and breathe, and eat, and sleep with another twenty odd people, so they're known as a sprag you know, a grass whatever...you're kinda in or your out and the experience might be more unpleasant to be out of it than in it even if it goes against their moral ground so sometimes to a degree they might go along with it and not report whatever's happened and...because if you like they're, I dunno, their peers would probably be less forgiving than what staff are to some degree [Lucy, pg. 11].

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Subtheme 2a: There is no middle ground in moral injury

I think that there's always going to be an element of that attached to them that I'm not a good person, I'd like to be a good person but I'm not a good person because of x, y, z. I've done bad things...I'm evil. I'm an evil person. I'm a bad person [James, pg. 13].





Subtheme 2b: Mutual avoidance maintains a fragmented identity

I don't think I've ever really noticed anything but maybe do they think differently of themselves now that they've done something like this. Do they think they're worthy of life anymore if they've taken someone else's? Like I've had, like I've listened. People say oh my life is over now like when they've come in from prison [er] I don't really know.

I: What do you think they mean by their life is over?

S: I suppose it depends on the sentence that like, depends how many years that they've been given so if they've been given like twenty years and they're already say what 40/50 it's like they're getting out when they're old [Sarah, pg. 8].



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Subtheme 3a: Insight is a double-edged sword

So, at some level, at some time I think once the psychotic sort of episode is treated, their acute psychotic episode is treated, then they are coming to terms with what's happened, what they have done, it is at that stage I think they have got the most, moral sort of crisis if it were... erm that's when they are most fragile, their moral structure [Jordan, pg. 3].





Subtheme 3b: Bathing in a sea of shame

They say a problem shared is a problem solved, so if they're able to share those thoughts, share those emotions, they can heal but sometimes they lock it so deep inside, you can't really get anything from them and slowly a part of them dies [Paul, pg.7].



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Belonging to something bigger

- Collective responsibility to achieve recovery
- The power of professionals
- Differentiating the concepts of fault and responsibility
- Finding a sense of purpose to create narratives of redemption (family, work and faith)



Subtheme 4a: Belonging to something bigger

It's difficult because you're in a position where you're having to change everybody's view, not just professionals, not just other people, other services, the wider community, the general public, everybody! You need everybody to have a level of understanding...People obviously don't see that but they are, they play a part, they play a role in that long term recovery [James, pg. 21].



The threat to restoration

- Lack of understanding
- Lack of consensus in the meaning of recovery
- Policies that seek to otherize
- The desire to punish, judge, and shame



Subtheme 4b: The threat to restoration

I think society wants to give them the chance but there is still this bit of stigma that follows...Even though society wants to integrate them they still berate them. Even though we want to accept them back and make them functional, we still give them a little bit of stigma...In a way to sort of create an identity for them. In a way to sort of well we don't want to associate with them too much, keeping them aside, that's it probably...on the service users it's very difficult because no matter how good they have been moving in their pathway, they still don't feel accepted completely [Paul, pg. 16].



Implications for practice

Individuals

Psychoeducation to build individuals understanding.

Offering opportunities to process the impact of past experiences to build a middle ground.

Forensic Settings

Creating a culture of moral integrity

The inclusion of MI within trauma informed service developments

Human sized services for humans

Society

Education to inform collective responsibility in repairing social harms

Inclusive policies

Building opportunities that foster belonging and purpose

Next steps

Phase 2

- Data collection with service users to explore their experiences
- Analysis

Phase 3

- Dissemination
- Incorporation of findings into trauma informed care practice across medium and low secure inpatient settings at South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Thank you

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