
Moral Injury Beyond the Battlefield

Traces of Moral Injury in the Leadership Narratives of Non-Military Leaders in Wartime Ukraine (2022–2025)

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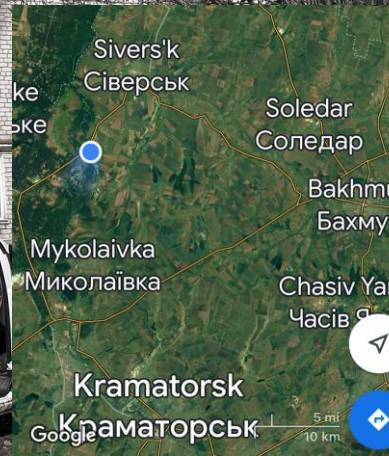
International Centre for Moral Injury
Durham University
20–22 April 2026



“We are not only afraid of dying. We are afraid of what this war is doing to our souls.”

Kyiv, 2021





The Human Face of Moral Injury



War Context and Research Focus

Context

Ukraine: 2014 → 2022 escalation
→ Moral distress across society

Focus

- Non-military leaders
 - Displaced Ukrainians
- Interpreting moral challenges

**Moral injury viewed through
the lens of:**

- Leadership
- Lived spirituality
- Qualitative narratives

What Is Moral Injury?

"Persistent distress that arises from a personal experience that disrupts or threatens: (a) one's sense of the goodness of oneself, of others, or of institutions, or (b) one's beliefs or intuitions about right and wrong, or good and evil."

VanderWeele et al., 2025

Moral Injurious Events

Moral Distress

Moral Injury

A continuum — Litz et al., 2009

Study on Spiritual Leadership in Wartime

60+

Leaders interviewed
across society

9 mo.

Fieldwork:
June 2023 – April
2024

10

Research questions
on spirituality &
leadership

Людяність — Liudianist

A moral framework functioning as an anchor in wartime, helping individuals resist the dehumanization that violent conflict can produce.

"For us in Ukraine, the concept of liudianist is very important. It must remain constant in both peace and war. When difficulties arise, these trials reveal whether our convictions about humanity are genuine."

— Participant P15

Suppression of Spirituality & Dehumanization

The moral threshold of war: the pressure to set aside spiritual ideals — to stop seeing the humanity of the enemy — as a perceived necessity for survival.

*We need to set aside spirituality for later...
We must distance ourselves from the Russians
so much that we stop seeing their humanity.*

— Ukrainian educational leader (P02)

Loss of Confidence & Personal Dignity

By 2023 → fear declines → loss of confidence becomes dominant

Ukrainian practitioners observe:

- Loss of dignity
- Identity shaken
- Worth questioned

The shadow of moral injury
may be present
even when unnamed

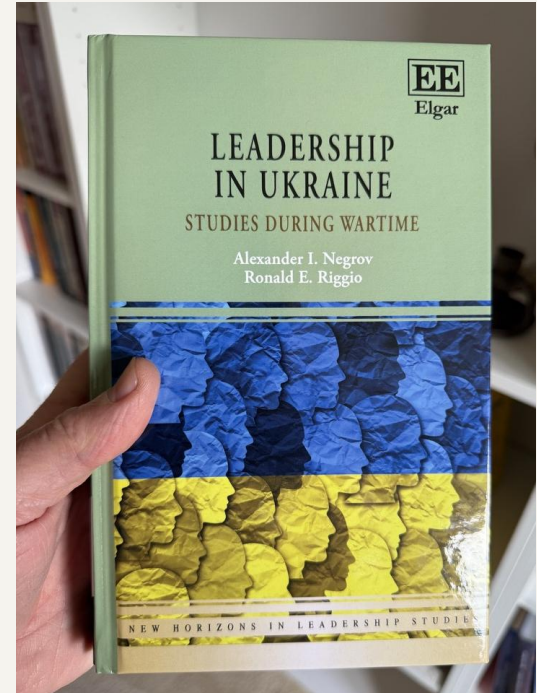
Study on Leadership Perceptions & Practices

280+

Leaders interviewed
in 2022 and in 2025

5

Research questions
on leadership



Moral Tension & Perceived Defeat (sample 2025)

72%

of leaders
reported
perceived defeat

*"We may have already lost
another war — the war for
respect for human dignity."*

*”...my inner voice asked
whether all my efforts were in vain”.*

— Organizational leader, 2025 survey

From Distress to Formation

Findings:

- Distress widespread
- Injury is rarely named
- Transformation emerging

Signs of Moral Formation

- Ethical reaffirmation in wartime
- Resilience & post-traumatic growth
- Renewed purpose & solidarity
- Expectation of post-war integrity

“We need people of integrity. War exposes everything. Will our institutions act justly? Will we care for the wounded? This concerns every one of us.”

— Ukrainian organizational leader (Res. D25–10, in Negrov, 2026)

LAUNCHING 2026

UkraineTraumaCare.org

Ukraine Trauma Care Hub

A Resource Platform for Trauma Care in Ukraine

FULL RESOURCE HUB LAUNCHING 2026

Thank You

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