

# Missing & Health

Shattered trust: The silent wounds of moral injury in relatives of missing people

**Pascale WASCHNIG**

PhD Psychology

School of Human and Social Sciences

[Pascale.waschnig@uwl.ac.uk](mailto:Pascale.waschnig@uwl.ac.uk) |



# Today

1

Research  
overview

2

Moral injury in  
families of missing  
people

3

Using Art to raise  
awareness, find  
meaning, and educate

*Moral injury*



# Self-care first

This presentation contains sensitive material related to **trauma, moral injury, grief, anxiety, depression, and going missing.**

The content may be distressing.

If you feel uncomfortable or need a break, please feel free to step away.

If at any point you feel overwhelmed, remember that it's okay to take care of yourself.

**Your emotional well-being is important.**

# AIM OF RESEARCH

1. To raise awareness and understanding of the support needs and challenges of relatives and friends of missing people and how they change over time.
2. Develop training materials and artefacts for mental health, health care providers to reduce moral injury, hermeneutical injury, foster empathy, and person-centred support.



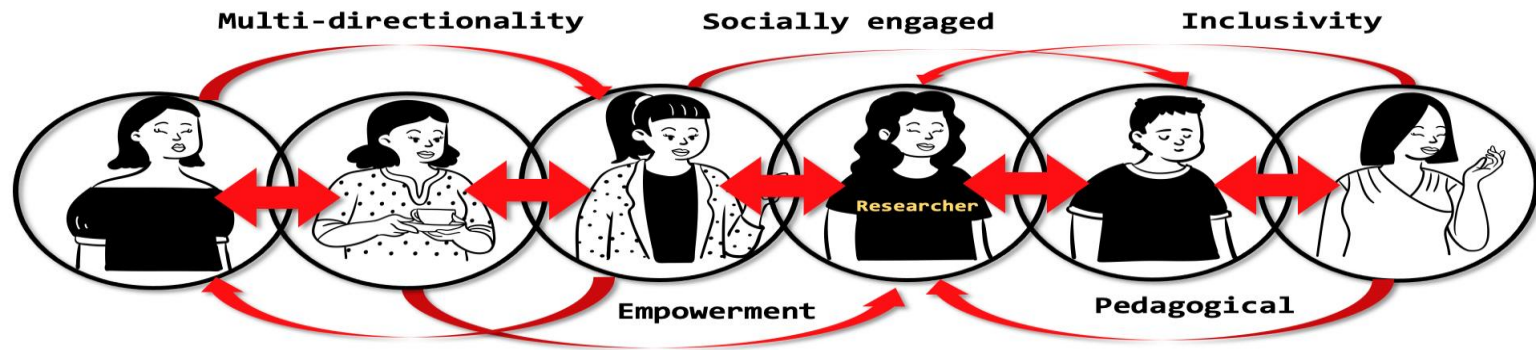
# moral injury

Moral injury refers to the psychological, emotional, and social harm experienced by individuals when they are involved in events that violate their deeply held moral beliefs or values.

Litz et al. (2009), Williamson et al. (2018), Shay (2014)

# hermeneutical injury

The harm caused when the process of interpreting and understanding a person's experience or text is done in a way that misrepresents, distorts, or invalidates their perspective. Fricker (2007), Foucault (1980), Mouffe (2000)



## ART-BASED METHODOLOGY



### MSc Psychology Findings and representation

6 life story interviews, focus  
group on need with 37  
participants, art exercise  
11 paintings and collages , 1  
animation, 1 film



### Life story Interviews

10 participants



### Art Workshops Body mapping as research method

5 participants



### Autoethnography

Narratives  
Paintings  
Creative expression  
Scoping review

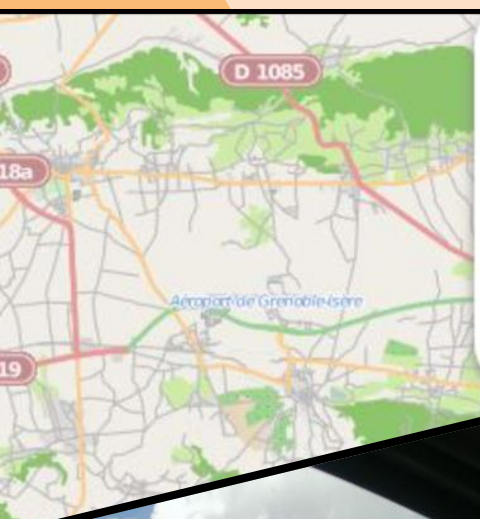


### Workshops medical, nursing and counselling schools

Body mapping and role  
play

## IMPACT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE





Aline PENON a quitte son domicile a Vourey le 3 mai 2013 pour faire une promenade dans la campagne. Elle a ensuite ete vue par un temoin a Morette, un autre temoin l'aurait vue le 5 mai a Vizille.

Aidez nous a la trouver! C'est une bonne marcheuse qui aurait pu etre prise en stop. Soyez vigilant et appelez la gendarmerie au 04 76 35 30 17 si vous l'apercevez! Merci



**AVIS RECHERCHE**  
Aline Lilina PENON  
68 ans, 1m60  
Malade d'Alzheimer  
Partagez, aidez  
nous à trouver  
notre mère !  
**TROUVONSALINE.FR**  
**/ TROUVONS ALINE**  
04 76 35 30 17

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**170,000**

Individuals per year (Missing  
People 2023) in the UK



**8-12 million**

Individuals per year in the world  
(estimation)





**170,000**

Individuals per year (Missing  
People 2023) in the UK

**X 12 =**

**Number of people  
impacted  
emotionally or  
financially by  
missing people**



**8-12 million**

Individuals per year in the world  
(estimation)



**170,000**

Individuals per year (Missing People 2023) in the UK

**2 million**

Number of people impacted emotionally or financially by missing people

**X 12 =**



**8-12 million**

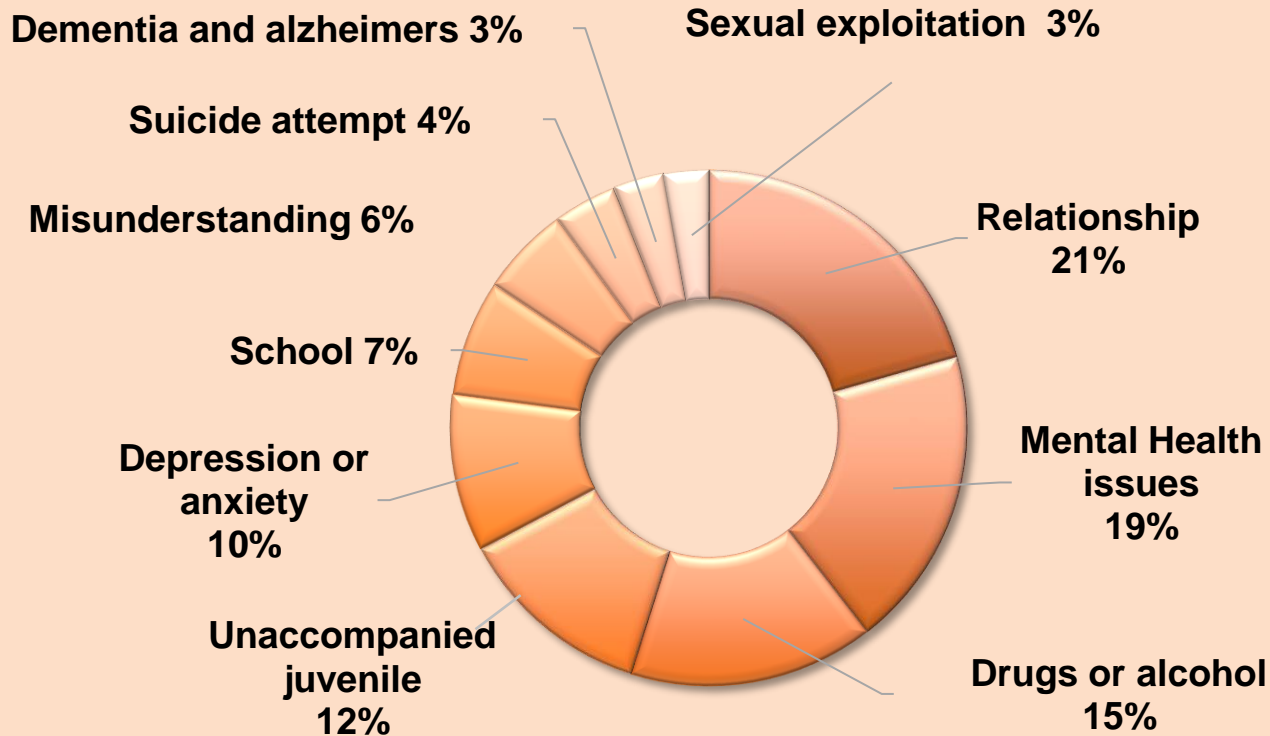
Individuals per year in the world (estimation)

**96-144 million**

# PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

National Crime Agency, 2021

## Reasons why people go missing



# RISK TO LIFE

(Missing People, 2023)



**4 in 10** people going missing are feeling suicidal

**3 in 4** adults report coming to harm while missing

**Half** of exploited children, and **a third** of trafficked children are reported missing from care each year.

The number of people dying while missing is consistently **higher** than the number of deaths from homicide.

# TRAUMA RESPONSE

ADMINISTRATIVE  
CHALLENGES

POLICE, MEDIA,  
PUBLIC BIASES

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

LEGAL  
CHALLENGES

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

- Ambiguous Loss (Boss, 2000, 2007, 2017)  
Limbo, missing person both present psychologically and absent physically
- Disenfranchised grief
- Unclear, uncertainty, helplessness
- Narrative void impacting the autobiographic self (Clifford et al., 2020)
- Anticipatory mourning
- Ruminating and counterfactual thinking
- Increase the likelihood of prolonged grief (PG), depression, and post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms.



EPISTEMIC (Hermeneutical)  
INJUSTICE

FINANCIAL  
CHALLENGES

# MORAL INJURY RESPONSE

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

Cognitive, intrusion, rumination, negative impacts on mental health, negative self-concepts around beliefs of worthlessness or failure

## BEHAVIOURAL

Avoidance  
interpersonal difficulties

## EXISTENTIAL

## EMOTIONAL

Guilt, shame, anger, grief, suicidal thoughts, hopelessness, emotional dysregulations

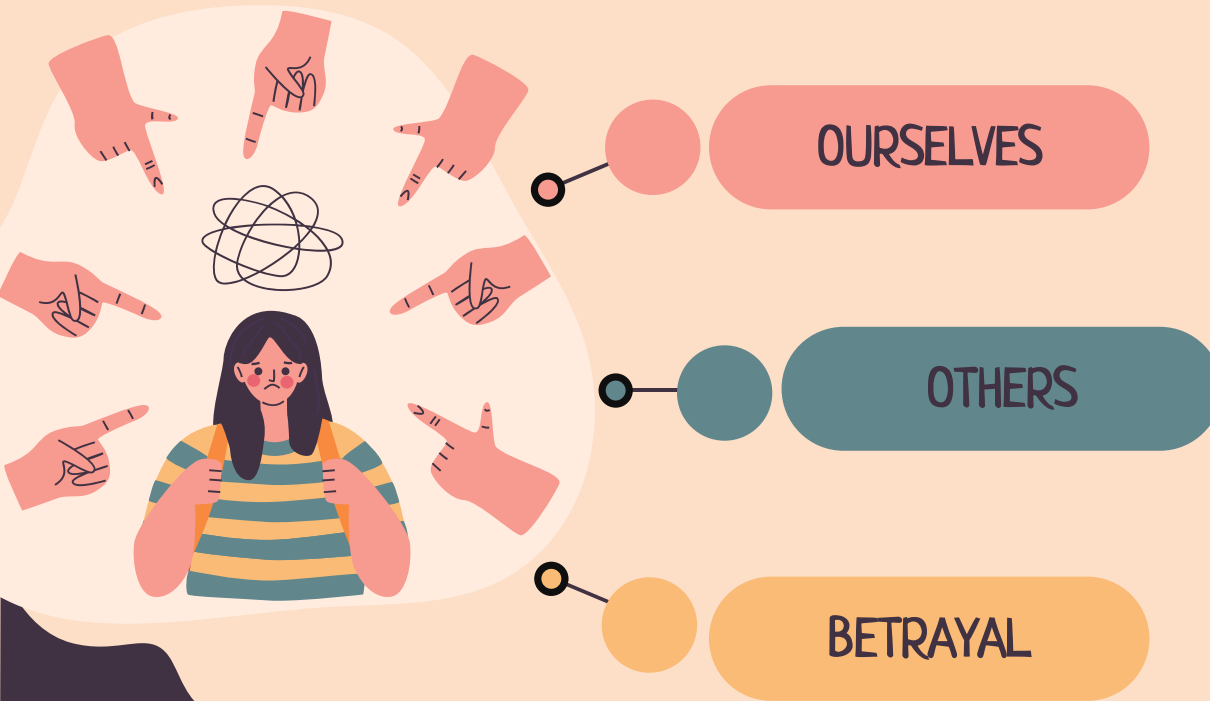
## SOCIAL

Alienation, social withdrawal, reduced capacity for trust





# MORAL INJURY



*Example of transgressions of values perceived:*

Legitimate unpreparedness  
Not being able to protect/prevent missing/find one's missing family member

*Example of transgressions of values perceived:* Cyberbullying, Lack of witness accounts and media attention  
Lack of understanding from others

*Example of transgressions of values perceived:* Lack of transparency in police resource allocation and processes, Lack of informed support

**Crisis intervention approach**

**Supporting families in the longer term**

**Changing the narrative**

**Moral Injury as response to Power imbalances  
(institutional inaction and blindness, ethical  
violence and moral distancing)**





## Missing People

5,537 followers

1d •

In partnership with the Mirror, we have put together a petition demanding urgent government action, with a focus on prevention and guaranteed support for those who go missing and those who are found.

Sign the petition to help us make sure that all missing people and their loved ones get the right help at the right time: <https://lnkd.in/ekVPTR92>



missingpeople.org.uk/united-by-hope-conference



Yahoo

All Bookmarks



## missing people in Spain is not that different from ours, in the UK

I was very impacted by the stories told by families. What saddens me the most is realising that families in Spain, as well as those in Italy, Mexico, France and England, must fight for justice, not to be ignored, among other issues.

How could this be? How is it possible that relatives of missing persons are still being overlooked in so many countries?

## We need to fight together for our rights internationally

People should not be discussing our courage or hope. It must be stated unequivocally that the families of missing persons are routinely ignored by those countries' legal systems and law enforcement agencies. Negligence can have devastating consequences for children, individuals, communities, and future generations. We rely on organisations to help us, but they can betray our trust and cause trauma. What society should provide for all is safety, fairness, trust in institutions, professionalism, humanism, and empathy...

### Table of Contents

- Celebrating our loved ones missing and coming together is heart-warming
- The pain of missing a loved one has no frontier
- Using art, and creative ways helps process emotions
- The experience of families of missing people in Spain is not that different from ours, in the UK

Hide this

We need to fight

# *Using art to understand, heal and educate*



# Externalizing the Unspeakable

## Neurobiological Mechanisms:

- Bilateral stimulation via large-scale painting engages both hemispheres,
- Enhancing memory reconsolidation  
Color/form metaphors externalize internal states, reducing avoidance (Haeyen S, 2021)

Somatic-Art (Heijman J et al. 2024)

Trauma Re-scripting via Embodied Metaphors  
(Haeyen S, 2021)

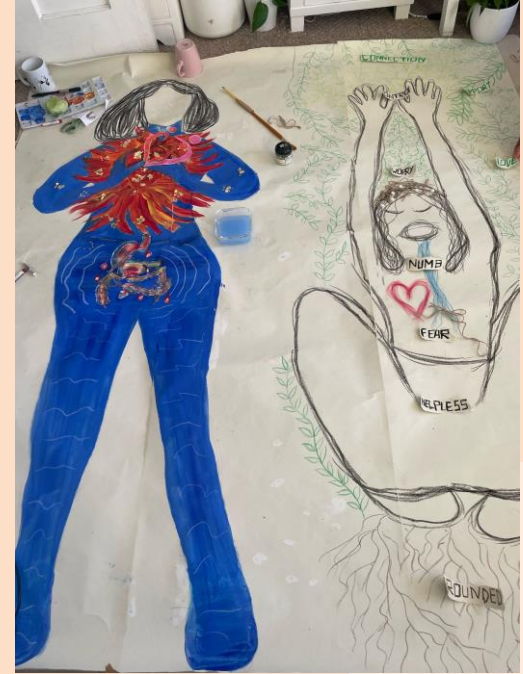
Memory Timeline Integration (Heijman J et al. 2024)





# Exploring empathy in Health, mental health

## Exploring strength and reframing narratives for families of missing people





Use QR code to download the free app ARTIVIVE on Google Play & iTunes to see the paintings come to live through augmented reality.  
You can also use your headphones for the sound.



1. **Install** the Artivive app

2. **View** the artwork through your smartphone



### The void in us

It is like a permanent part of you is missing... This emptiness is so incredibly painful...

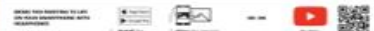
*The empty space left behind, we grieve every day, waiting for news that might help us understand what and why this happened.*

*It's just to know, isn't it?*

*Nothing more, but yet so much.*

*It doesn't sound like much, but it's pretty big!*

Artivive on paper | Viewing from iPhone AR app with compatible headphones and (headset of missing people) | Through the Prism of Missing, 2016



### It is always with you

If you don't know anything, you just imagine everything... But there is that possibility... that somebody out there does know... It's just a terrible way for a human being to have to live with all those horrible thoughts. It's always with you. It's always there. He is always there... But you can't actually allow yourself to go down that rabbit hole and wallow in it. You try and put all those emotions in boxes. You just have to deal with it the best we can day in, day out.

Artivive on paper | Viewing from iPhone AR app with compatible headphones and (headset of missing people) | Through the Prism of Missing, 2016



### Constantly filling the gaps...

It's not something you expect to ever happen in your family. Because it is incomprehensible and awful, everything has just lost its ground and bearing. It's like living a nightmare, hope is all we have. Getting the police to do anything was really hard work. As you sort of have to lead your own investigation... but it's pretty much like looking for a needle in a haystack. There is always hope that somebody must know something. In the dark days, the worst of scenarios come back to mind, the crying floods are open, will I ever see them again?

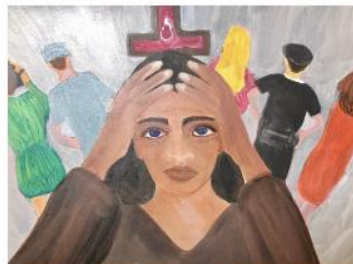
Artivive on paper | Viewing from iPhone AR app with compatible headphones and (headset of missing people) | Through the Prism of Missing, 2016



### Keep circling around

First, the rupture to normal life, an explosion within you, like your whole life and your family's life has just exploded, like your whole life has been shredded in that wretched poster... Trying to escape by waiting for a flood with your belongings in a box. The word missing constantly bears down on top of you with all that anxiety and depression and cycle of hoping and despairing, and it just feels overwhelming. You just keep circling around... going back to that again, like a broken record... we crawl into our wounds that never heal and hide... How is that possible that that happened? This sense of the incomprehensible? Help from people, the church, mental health support, hope and missing people comes as a slow-moving boat... The media is a double-edged sword, so helpful but also so overwhelming. The police, as a big heavy anchor, is dragging us down. Time doesn't heal. Time doesn't repair. We learn to re-live each day of our agony as an unending record that starts with searching and concludes with the dissolution of our world.

Artivive on paper | Viewing from iPhone AR app with compatible headphones and (headset of missing people) | Through the Prism of Missing, 2016



### Moral injury

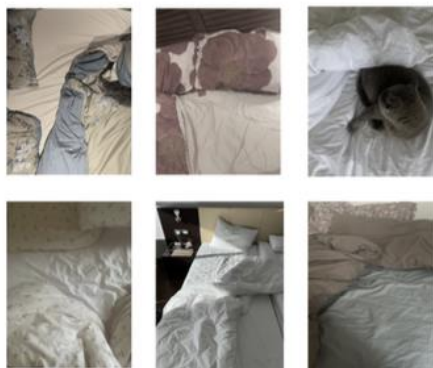
There are a lot of unanswered questions that you have to learn to live with. You want the world to stop and help you, but you must learn to accept that the media, the police, and social services have all other priorities... You feel so powerless, harmed by the inaction of authorities and a society that doesn't care about the families nor how to prevent people from going missing.

Artivive on paper | Viewing from iPhone AR app with compatible headphones and (headset of missing people) | Through the Prism of Missing, 2016



### 3 MINUTE FILM

Youtube: [https://youtu.be/E\\_LNJ2-Mlco?si=2W4GaCtJCKSBWdD](https://youtu.be/E_LNJ2-Mlco?si=2W4GaCtJCKSBWdD)



## THE EMPTY BEDS

### MISHEARD

*That sensation of I've got nowhere else to go that made me attempt to take my life...*

*...but doctors do tend to believe what the police tell them over what you are telling them is actually going on.*

*And I think that part of the problem was I felt I really wasn't believed about the level and pressure the police put on."*

Dad, 14-year-old son missing for 18 years



### Children left behind

Children are often forgotten, everyone tries to protect them from the cruel reality of what is happening, but they suffer in silence from it.

It feels so hard to talk about it. For the families, and the communities, it feels like an open wound that keeps opening.

Yet talking and seeking help for their mental health and support is crucial for children to make sense of their experience and so they can maintain continuing bonds with the missing person.



Art by: [unclear] / Finding Families who help with the search and support for those who are missing through the work of Missing One





## I DON'T KNOW HOW TO LIVE LIKE THIS

Because of the high level of uncertainty, it's as though I don't know anything anymore.

I've been a mental health professional all my life, people would say, she has her training to help her cope.



I mean, you can have the best training in the world but you're still a mum. You're still completely broken hearted. A broken heart is a broken heart. It doesn't matter what training you have!

Psychiatrist, whose adult son went missing when experiencing psychotic episodes



## I SHOULD HAVE SAID YES

The doctor did say to me;  
"Do you think maybe you need some counselling?"

and in my head, I was going YES!  
and in my body, I was saying NO!

"I think it's... you know... I'll be okay..."

Then I thought about it afterwards.  
I thought I shouldn't have turned it away.

I should have said yes.  
Nobody asked again...

Mother, son missing since 1996 after a night out



## THROWING PILLS AT US IT'LL BE OKAY!

"We'd like to drug you up so that you are calmer.

It'll be okay.

I'm sure he'll be coming back."

"But I feel there is something SERIOUSLY wrong here ... it is not like him!

and

Nobody's looking...

Nobody's listening..."

Mother, whose son went missing 29 years ago



## HOLDING SPACE

I remember going to see my GP and I sat down, he never clinched, he gave absolutely no negative sign whatsoever that time was running out, he just was amazing! I had no idea that he gave me all that time. And that was exactly what was required.

Dad, missing his sons since 2007





# THANK YOU!

## Any questions ?

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this presentation and would like some support, please contact  
**Missing People** on 116 000, [www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)

**Pascale Waschnig**  
Pascale.waschnig@uwl.ac.uk

