Reframing Recovery

A Practice-Based Eight-Dimension Model for Moral Injury in Civilian and Institutional Contexts

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Opening Context

- A clinical journey — and an unexpected direction
- Moral injury emerged as the central focus of practice
- Grounded in real-world patterns across institutional settings
- Shared today in the spirit of collaboration

Collaboration

- This model continues to evolve through ongoing clinical practice
- Screening tools are currently in development
- Designed to better identify and track psychological injury
- Focus: moral injury — often present but not yet recognised

The Central Spine

Disruption · System Interaction · Recovery

The Eight Dimensions

Recognition Naming the moral rupture	**Regulation** Managing the emotional response	**Reactivation** Triggers and re-exposure	**Rumination** Persistent cognitive replay
Rage Signal of unresolved conflict	**Reconstruction** Rebuilding moral identity	**Reconnection** Re-engaging with others	**Reorientation** Renewed purpose and meaning

Clinical Development

- Career began in broad psychological practice across diverse presentations
- Developed a strong interest in post-traumatic stress disorder
- Primary approaches: trauma-informed CBT and exposure-based techniques
- Recognised, in hindsight, I was not only treating threat-based injury
- Increasingly encountering violation-based, ethical and moral injury

Pattern Recognition

- Referral base shifted — without deliberate decision — toward trauma
- Past five years: almost entirely workers' compensation presentations
- Specialised caseload allowed patterns to become clearly visible
- Not just patterns in symptoms — but in how injury is organised and maintained

Moral Disruption

- Being treated in ways that felt unjust
- Required to engage in processes that felt unreasonable
- Experiencing silence, delays, and lack of transparency
- A profound sense of isolation
- These are not simply stressors — they are points of moral disruption
- Violations of what the individual believed to be fair, expected, or right

Recognising Moral Injury

What I had been describing as betrayal—
I now understood was more accurately
described as moral injury.

But the type I was seeing was different.
It was being caused differently.

Military vs Civilian Moral Injury

EVENT-BASED (Military)

- Anchored to a specific rupture
- A moment — or series of moments
- Often, the person can name it
- There is a before and an after
- The combat, at least, is over

PROCESS-BASED (Civilian)

- Rarely arrives cleanly — it accumulates
- Delay, disbelief, procedural demand
- Treated as a claimant, not a human being
- Slow erosion of trust in institutions
- The injury is still unfolding

Cumulative Moral Disruption

- The injury is not contained in the past
- Repeatedly activated, reinforced, amplified in the present
- Every review, every form, every phone call — a potential continuation
- The system does not simply fail to heal
- It becomes part of the injury mechanism
- Rather than a single rupture: cumulative moral disruption over time

Shame vs Rage

SHAME (Military)

- Unbearable weight of something done
- Or not done — that cannot be undone
- Internally directed
- Guilt and complicity
- What I did, or failed to do

RAGE (Civilian)

- Accurately located injustice
- Morally coherent response to ongoing wrong
- Or: the silence of depression
- Emergence of rage = first sign of recovery
- If we misread it, we reach for the wrong tools

Walking the Spine

An Applied Example — Ray

Ray — Background

- Nearly thirty years as an emergency services worker
- Small country town — everyone knows everyone
- Arrives at a motor vehicle accident — standard call
- Among the critically injured: someone he knows. Someone close to him.
- He does his job. That is what thirty years teaches you.
- But something breaks that day. Quietly, and completely.

Ray — The System Response

- Ray takes a month off work and gets some support
- He goes back — because that is the kind of person he is
- Two months later: placed on a performance management process
- Three months after that: overlooked for an expected promotion
- No explanation. No acknowledgement of what he had been through.
- The original wound was devastating — but the institution transformed it into moral injury

That Is Who Walks Into the Room

Ray didn't just lose something that day on the roadside.

He lost his trust in the organisation he had given three decades to.
He lost his sense that doing the right thing is recognised and protected.
He lost his footing in the world.

— And that is where the spine begins

Recognition

- Ray believed everything that had happened was his fault
- The accident. The time off. The performance process. All of it.
- Thirty years of service — and his conclusion was that he had simply failed
- Recognition meant helping Ray see: this was not failure — it was violation
- Performance process, promotion withheld, no acknowledgement of cost
- That reframe — from failure to violation — begins the healing journey

Regulation, Reactivation & Rumination

- Regulation: flashbacks, hypervigilance, alcohol use — not simply fear
- His system responding to ongoing perceived violation, not only the past
- We were not calming a past event — we were working with a system still under threat
- Reactivation: every email, assessment, legal letter landed like a fresh injury
- The system was not part of the solution — it was part of the mechanism
- Rumination: searching, repeatedly, for a way to make the contradiction make sense

Rage

- For a time Ray was numb — flattened by depression into exhausted silence
- As healing began, stronger emotions started to surface
- Particularly rage — not loss of control, but accurate location of injustice
- Rage reflects two things: recognition of violation, and frustration of resolution
- It is a symptom — a signal the injury is still active and demanding a response
- Rage from moral injury is not a behavioural problem to manage — it is information

Reconstruction, Reconnection & Reorientation

- Reconstruction: separating what he was responsible for from what he was not
- Moral coherence — values and self-understanding coexisting with what happened
- Reconnection: moral injury fractured relationships with others, self, and systems
- He found his way back to people first — systems, cautiously, came last
- Reorientation: what happened became part of his story, not the only chapter
- Not resolution in the tidy sense — but integration

Recovery that does not ask people to make peace with what was wrong.

Recovery that does not ask people to move on before the injury has been named.

Recovery that does not ask individuals to abandon what they know to be true.

Thank You