## Moral Injury Fact Sheet

## WHAT IS MORAL INJURY?



Moralinjury is described as intense psychological distress which results from actions, or lack of actions, which violate an individual's moral or ethical code.

Simply put, moral injury occurs when you do something - or are unable to do something - that goes against your core values.

## How does moral injury occur?

**Act of commission** When an individual has done something they should not have done



#### Examples:

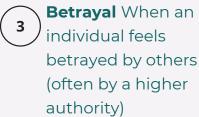
• A healthcare worker, during a very stressful situation, yells harshly at a patient out of frustration. Later, they feel deep regret and shame because they believe they should not have spoken that way to someone in need.

**Act of omission** When an individual should have done something but they did not



#### Examples:

• A community leader sees a family in crisis after losing their home but feels overwhelmed and does not step in to offer help or comfort. Later, the leader feels deep guilt and shame, believing they should have done something but remained silent or inactive.





#### Examples:

• A group of aid workers risk their lives to support a community after a disaster, but later discover that their leaders withheld resources or gave false information. The workers feel deeply betrayed because the people they trusted and depended on failed them in a critical moment.

### The effect of moral injury

Although moral injury is not classified as a mental health condition, people may experience profound feelings of shame, guilt, blame and anger. These symptoms can impact their day-to-day functioning and family life.

A study indicates that members of the Ethiopian community, including leaders and helpers, who experience moral injury—such as distress from actions or events conflicting with their values—are at a higher risk of developing severe mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and suicidal thoughts.



# Is moral injury the same as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

- Unlike PTSD, which can occur following threat-based trauma, potentially morally injurious events do not necessarily involve a threat to life.
- As such, distress from morally injurious events can lead to different symptom profiles than distress from traumatic events that elicit a fear-based reaction.
- Unlike post-traumatic stress disorder, moral injury is not considered a mental illness.
- Though moral injury is not the same as PTSD, both may exist alongside each
  other, and ex-Service personnel with moral injury or traumatic events were more
  likely to meet the criteria for PTSD, depression, and anxiety than those who
  reported no challenging events during service.

## Does moral injury only effect helping professionals?

No

Research on moral injury, initially focused on various groups, shows that it is also prevalent within the Ethiopian community, including leaders, helpers, and others. Many individuals face ethical dilemmas in their roles or daily lives, and moral injury is not limited by occupation or position. Anyone in the community can experience moral injury.

