



Results from a Swedish veteran survey and veteran-oriented clinical method for healing

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Photo: Hampus Hagstedt, SAF

Veteran Survey Study

To contribute to a deeper understanding of health-related outcomes following trauma and stress exposure in connection with participation in Swedish international military operations with a specific focus on **PTSD indication** and **moral injury symptoms**.



Photo: Mats Nyström, SAF

Project members

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Background

- Variation of service-related stressors during international deployment; exposure to traumatic events.
- According to Swedish veteran research, a majority of Swedish officers and soldiers who have served abroad do relatively well (AuxMilitary, 2023; Larsson et al., 2020; Nilsson et al., 2024).
- A smaller group has mental and physical problems, for ex. higher risk of receiving a PTSD diagnosis from doctors in specialized care, AuxMilitary, 2023).



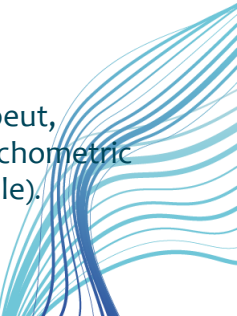
Foto: Mats Nyström/SAF

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

A mental health condition that may develop in some people who have experienced a highly stressful event

- Intrusion/re-experiencing symptoms
- Avoidance symptoms
- Arousal and reactivity symptoms
- Cognition and mood symptoms

(Weathers, Litz, Keane, Palmieri, Marx & Schnurr; National Center for PTSD, USA; Svensk validering via Nenad Paunovic', Docent i psykologi, legitimerad psykoterapeut, handledare och lärare i psykoterapi (september 2015). Språkgranskad enligt ISO 9001:2008 och EN-15038:2006; Bondjers, K., Willebrand, M., Arnberg, F. (2020). Psychometric properties of the Swedish version of the PTSD checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5): sensitivity, specificity, diagnostic accuracy and structural validity in a mixed trauma sample).



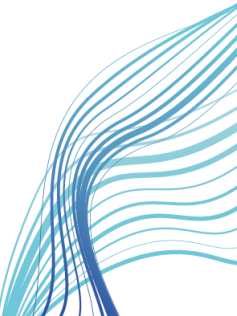
Moral Injury

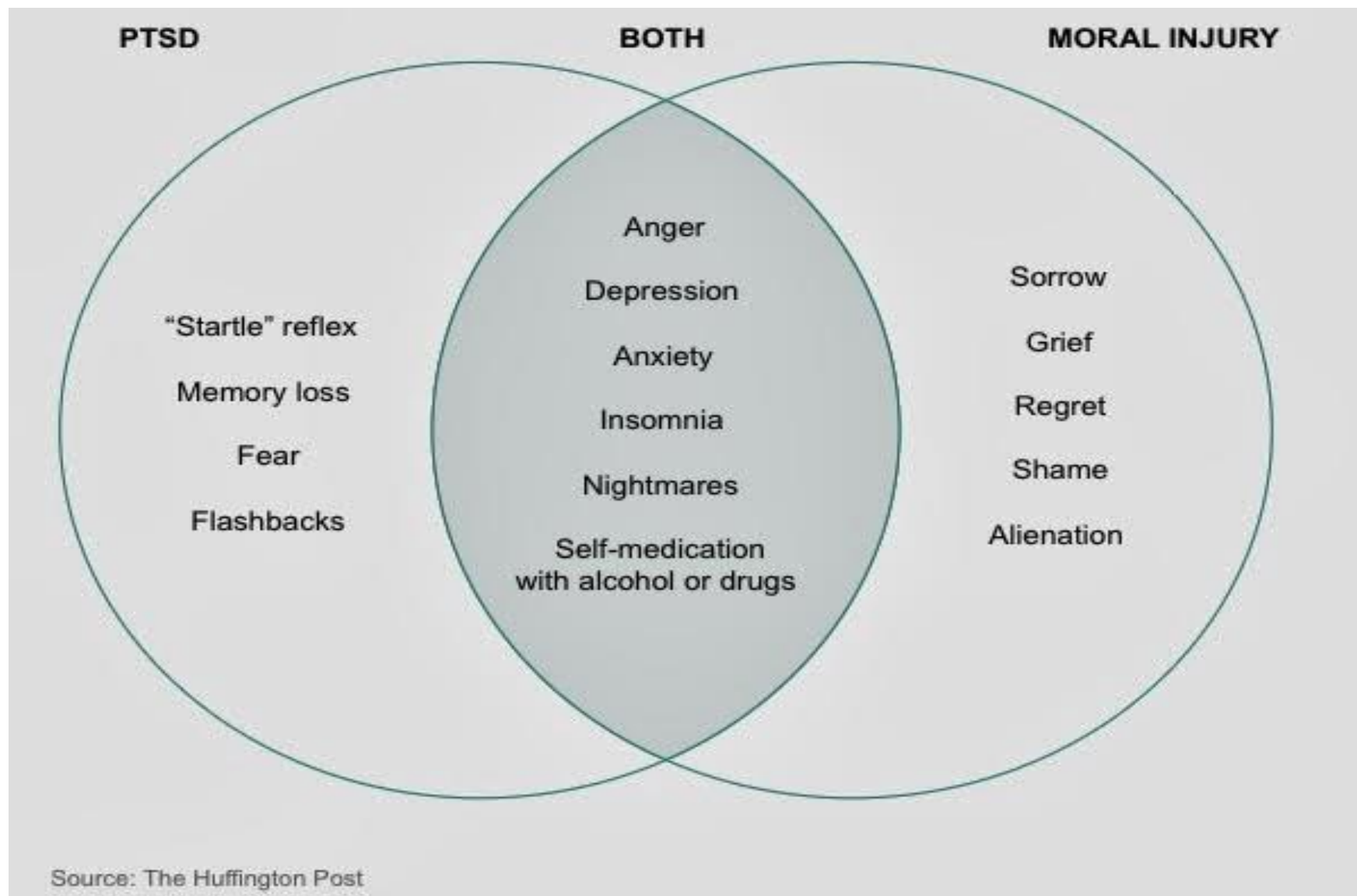
(see for example, Litz et al., 2022; Nash et al., 2013; Shay, 2014)

Potentially morally injurious event (PMIE)

- Does something (or fail to do something) that goes against one's own moral code or values
- Sees someone (or people) do something or fail to do something that goes against own moral code or values
- Is directly affected by someone doing something or failing to do something that is against one's own moral code or values (e.g., being betrayed by someone you trust)

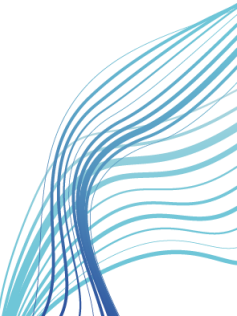
→ The distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and sometimes spiritual aftermath of exposure to such events; guilt, shame, loss of trust, etc.





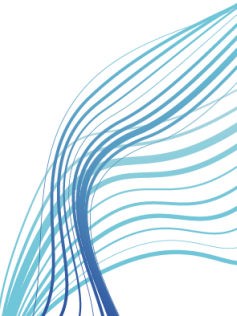
Presentation Emphasis

- 1) The prevalence of PTSD and moral injury indication, and
- 2) how these conditions relate to each other.



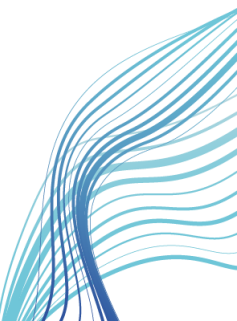
Measurements, reliability tests

- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist (PCL – 5), $\alpha = .94$
 - A-criteria (trauma exposure/highly stressful event)
- Morally injury outcome scale (MIOS), $\alpha = .90$
 - Loss of trust-related $\alpha = .83$
 - Shame-related $\alpha = .90$



Methodological Considerations

- Self-report data
- Screening → prevalence of PTSD indication
- Caution in interpreting cutoff scores
- Ethical approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2023-04097-01)



Selection

6000 individuals randomly selected from the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) Veteran registry

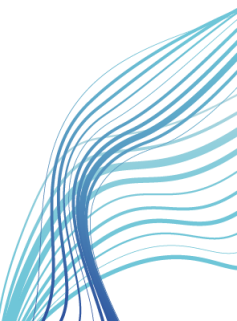
Response rate:
 $N=1940, 32\%$

The Most Stressful Event & related symptom

(PTSD indication)

Examples,

- The Srebrenica massacre.
- Subjected to indirect fire at the camp.
- Fired upon during a meeting with the local population.
- Severely injured by a landmine in [...], everyone else in the platoon died. They were from [name of countries].
- Continuous combat for four days.
- Landmine traps on the roads we used. A local drove over an anti-tank mine with his family.
- We had several suicides during my deployment.



Prevalence of PTSD indication ($N=1915$)

- PTSD symptoms (range 0-80)
 - PTSD indication (> 32): 2.5% ($n=48$)
 - No PTSD indication (≤ 32): 97.5% ($n=1867$)

The Most Morally Challenging Event and related symptoms

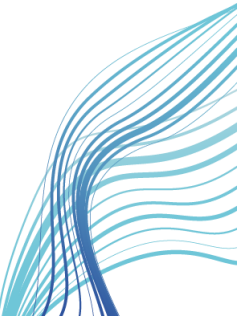
(Moral Injury Symptoms)

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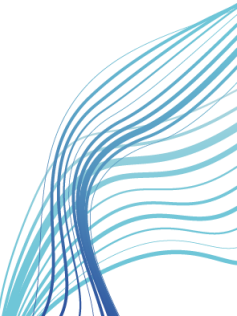
Examples,

- We could offer very good care to [our men], but not to civilians. Like when we tried to get a civilian woman by helicopter to our [name of own camp] hospital, we were not allowed. They refused of course. It was frustrating. She was the one most wounded during the mission.
- When a police posting in the nearby area was attacked by [nationality], we prepared for rushing to their rescue, but because of doubt and fear among the leaders and the management, we were not allowed to go and rescue them, but they were left to their fate.
- Srebrenica... powerlessness and frustration.
- Saw other countries' soldiers bringing little children back to their rooms. Went and held their hand and it was more of a sexual character than like a parent holding their child's hand.



Morally challenging event, cont.

- 65% observed someone else's actions (or their failure to act)
- 59% were directly affected by someone else's acts (or their failure to act)
- 39% reported that they did or failed to do something themselves



Prevalence of moral injury symptoms

Symptom severity (range 0-56)

- No symptoms (0-13): 80%
- Mild (14-28): 16%
- Moderate (29-42): 3.6%
- Severe (43-56): 0.4%

Subgroup comparisons

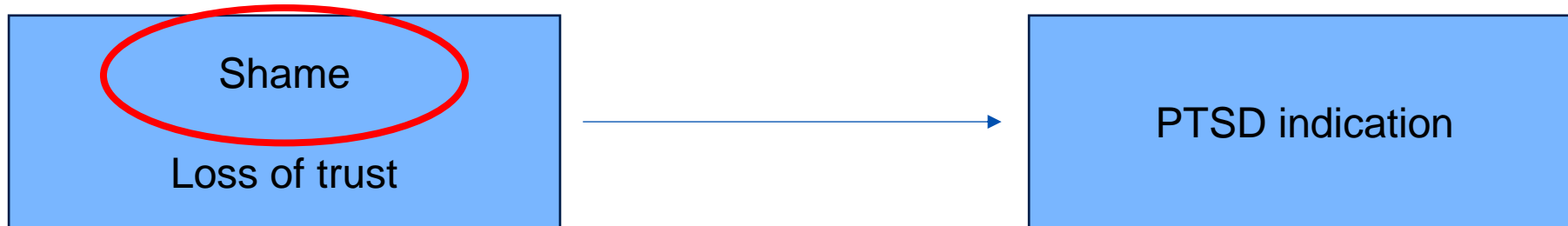
→ Individuals reporting about their **own action or inaction** to a morally injurious event (perpetration-based events) reported **higher prevalence of moral injury-related symptoms**.



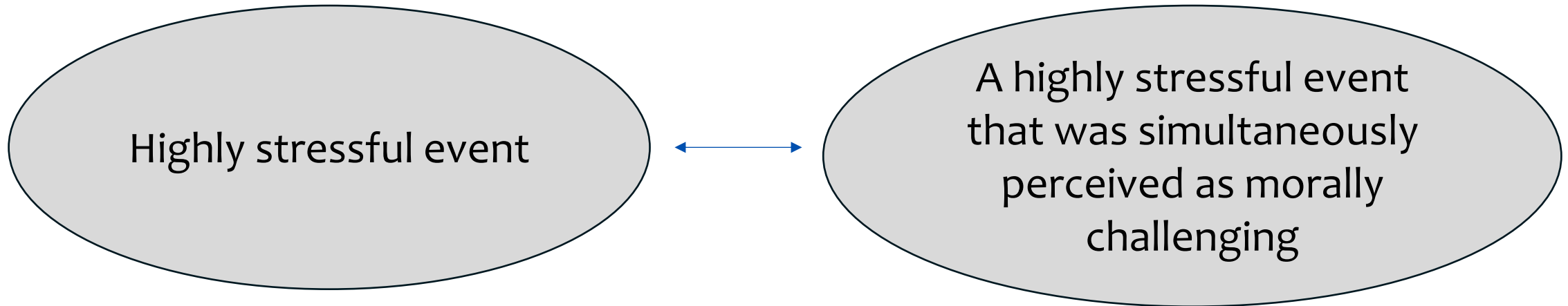
Photo: Mats Nyström/Combat Camera/SAF

Associations between PTSD indication and Moral Injury Symptoms

- High associations (.71, $p = .001$)



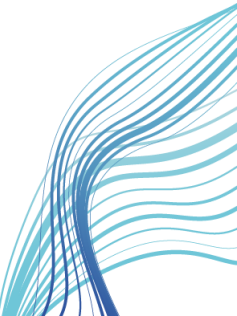
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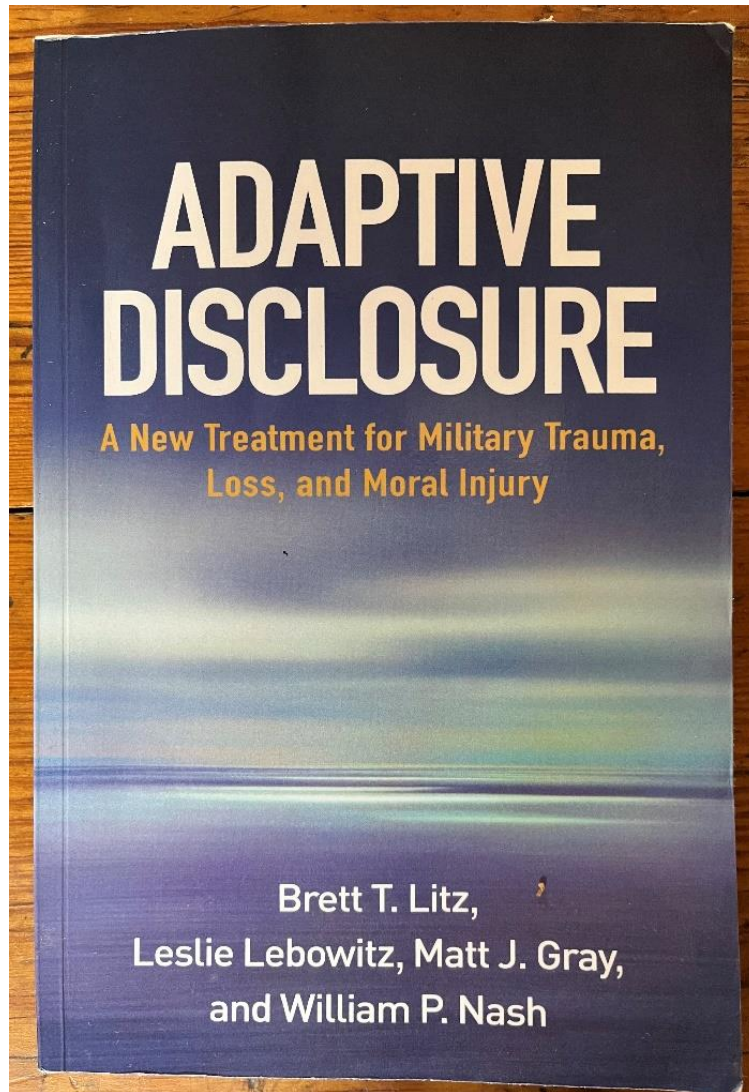


- Less favorable on all symptom scales
- Less favorable on the PTSD indication scale, and subscales
- Less favorable on the MIOS subscale shame

Take aways

- A majority of Swedish officers and soldiers who have served abroad do relatively well.
- A small group fulfilled the cutoff score criteria of PTSD and moral injury indication.
- A number reported milder symptoms of psychological and moral distress.
- Individuals own action(s)/inaction(s) indicates a stronger relationship with moral injury symptoms.
- Moral injury subscale shame has the strongest relationship with PTSD indication in Swedish military veterans.
- The risk of ill-health highest when an event is simultaneously perceived as very stressful (fear-based) and morally challenging, and the event is perpetration-based





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Thanks for your attention!

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