

The Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families releases new findings on moral injury in public service personnel

Situations on the job that violate deeply held beliefs can lead to moral injury

OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA, October 6, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the various forms of distress and trauma that public safety personnel (PSP) — paramedics, police officers, firefighters and others — can experience on the job. From the demands of an overstretched health care system, to having to follow policies and procedures with which they may not agree, to lacking formal support programs, PSP are experiencing what are now known as moral injuries, and these can negatively impact their own health and well-being.

Moral injury refers to the psychological, social and spiritual impacts of events involving a betrayal of a person's deeply held morals, values or beliefs, whether a person witnesses, is involved in, or is unable to prevent the event. Left unaddressed, these situations may lead to moral injury, which is associated with a broad range of outcomes that can include guilt, shame, anxiety, anger, loss of faith in others and in spiritual beliefs. Moral injury can have an enduring impact on self-image and worldview and can be present alongside post-traumatic stress disorder.

In an effort to better understand the types of situations that Canadian PSP identify as betraying their core beliefs, and the impacts of moral injury in PSP, the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families conducted a study with 38 paramedics in an Ontario-based service. The findings are being released today in a formal report along with a plain language summary.

"Our study, which represents the first original research to be released by the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families, reveals that the concept of moral injury resonates with the lived experiences of public safety personnel," said Fardous Hosseiny, President and CEO of the Atlas Institute and co-Principal Investigator on the study. "Canadians understand that public safety personnel are routinely exposed to traumatic situations, but the mental health impact of situations that betray their personal and professional values is discussed far less often. This new study demonstrates that moral injury offers a novel lens through which to identify these situations and consider tailored responses to the distress that may arise as a result."

One of the more startling findings was the extent to which moral injury was resulting from structural and institutional issues within the organization and the larger health care system.

Responses associated with moral injury, such as loss of trust in leadership, emerged when PSP felt unsupported or unheard by their leadership, and when they had limited control over work conditions and decision-making. The research also identified that pressures exerted on the health care system by a range of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, also resulted in outcomes associated with moral injury. Situations such as being unable to provide adequate treatment to patients because of high demand for care were cited as examples of morally concerning situations.

“Our study of the lived experiences of public safety personnel illustrates that it is not one single event that produces the mental health impacts associated with moral injury, but rather the accumulation of exposure to situations that betray core beliefs in combination with frequent exposure to traumatic situations and routine stress,” reported Dr. Sara Rodrigues, Director of Applied Research at the Atlas Institute and co-Principal Investigator for this study. “Being attentive to the potential for moral injury in public safety personnel is vital in order to help manage its specific mental health impacts such as feelings of anger and helplessness, impaired social functioning, self-loathing, and a tainted view of the world.”

Dr. Rodrigues will be presenting the findings of the study at a virtual town hall co-hosted by the Atlas Institute and Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment. The event will be held on 13 October 2022 at 1 p.m. Eastern time. For further information: <https://www.cipsrt-icrtsp.ca/en/knowledge-for-you/webinars>

The study reports can be accessed on the Atlas Institute for Veteran and Families’ website at <https://atlasveterans.ca/knowledge-hub/moral-injury/experiences-of-moral-injury-in-canadian-public-safety-personnel>.

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About the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families: The Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families works with Veterans, Families, service providers and researchers to bridge the divide between research and practice so Veterans and their Families can get the best possible mental health care and supports. The Atlas Institute was originally established as the Centre of Excellence on PTSD and Related Mental Health Conditions, through the Minister of Veterans Affairs 12 November 2015 mandate letter, with funding and budget announced in the March 2017 federal budget.

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