

TREATING MORAL INJURY

A PILOT STUDY

Professor Dominic Murphy

Head of Research, *Combat Stress*

KCMHR, *King's College London*

Director of Research & Trustee, *Forces in Mind Trust*

President, *UK Psychological Trauma Society*

THE TEAM:

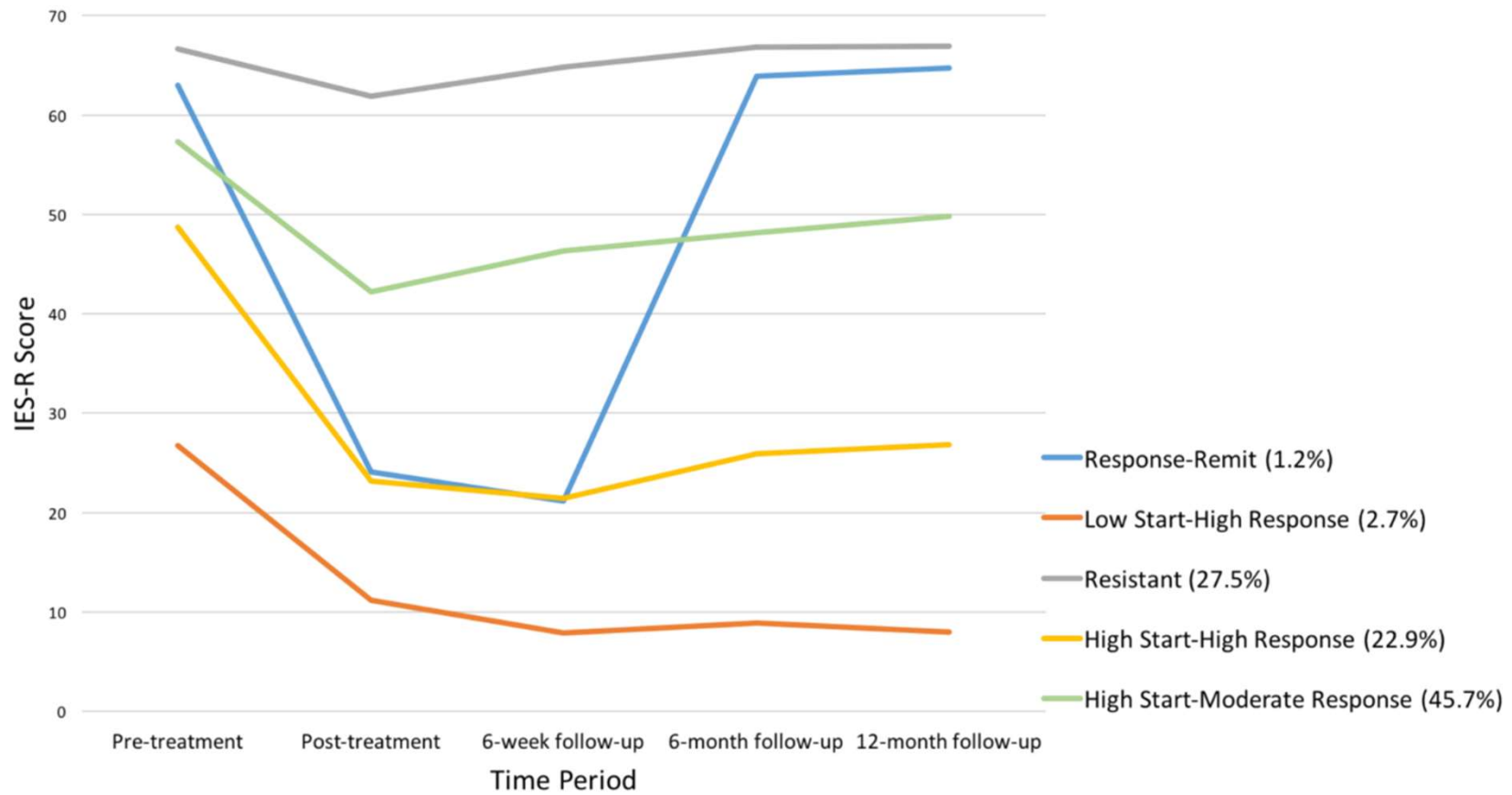
Prof Neil Greenberg

Dr Vici Williamson

Amanda Bonson

UK PTSD TREATMENT OUTCOMES

PTSD Trajectories



MORAL INJURY

A Background



perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations



Litz (2009)

Potentially morally injurious events include acts of

- **Commission** - did something (or failed to do something) that went against your moral code or values
- **Omission** - you saw someone do something that went against your moral code or values;
- **Betrayal** - you were directly affected by someone doing something or failing to do something that went against your moral code or values (e.g., being betrayed by someone you trusted).

Moral Injury is...

- ...common
- ...most strongly associated with PTSD
- ...**not** a mental illness
- ...associated with poorer outcomes from gold standard treatments when co-occurring with PTSD.

Williamson et al (2019)

MORAL INJURY

Missed by the DSM-V Definition of PTSD?

	PTSD	Moral Injury
Triggering Event (A1 Criterion)	Actual or threatened death or serious injury	Acts that violate deeply held moral values
Individual's role at time of Event	Victim Witness	Perpetrator Victim Witness
Predominant painful emotion (A2 Criterion)	Fear Horror Hopelessness	Guilt Shame Anger
Re-experiencing (B Criteria)	☑	☑
Avoidance or numbing (C Criteria)	☑	☑
Physiological arousal level (D Criteria)	☑	☒
What necessity is lost?	Safety	Trust

MORAL INJURY

Relationship between Moral Injury and Complex PTSD

Complex PTSD = PTSD + Disturbances in Self-Organisation

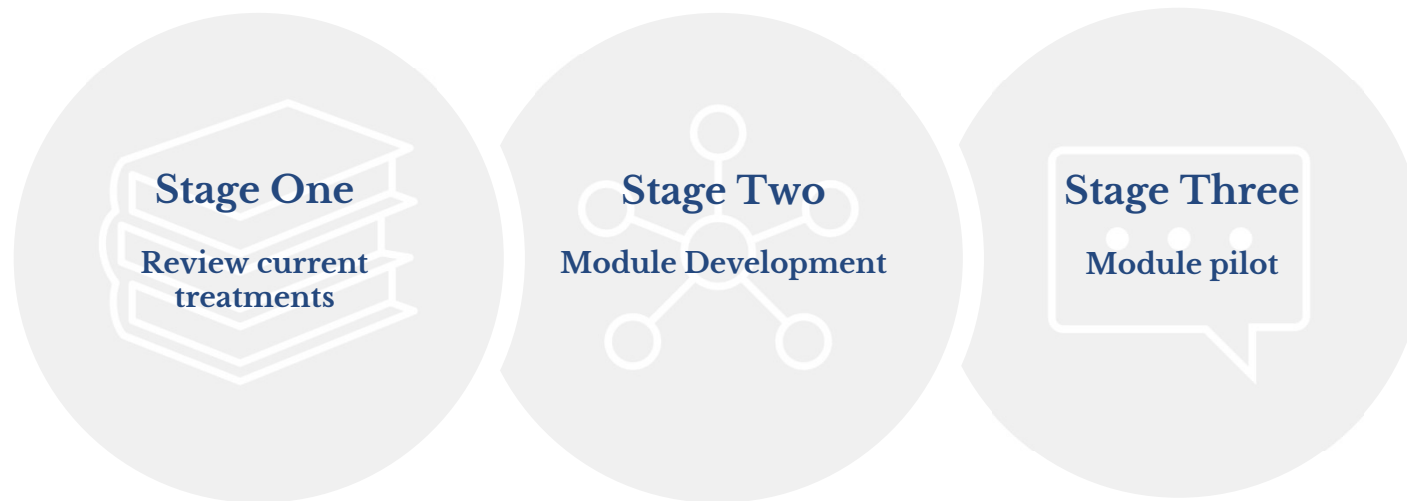
	ITQ Score	ITQ DSO	ITQ PTSD
ITQ Score	1.00		
ITQ DSO	.921*	1.00	
ITQ PTSD	.911*	.678*	1.00
Moral Injury (MIOS)	.616*	.647*	.493*

Tentative evidence that Disturbances in Self-Organisation is **more strongly** related to Moral Injury, compared to PTSD symptoms of Complex PTSD ([Currier, Murphy et al, 2021](#))

DEVELOPING A TREATMENT FOR MORAL INJURY

TREATING MORAL INJURY

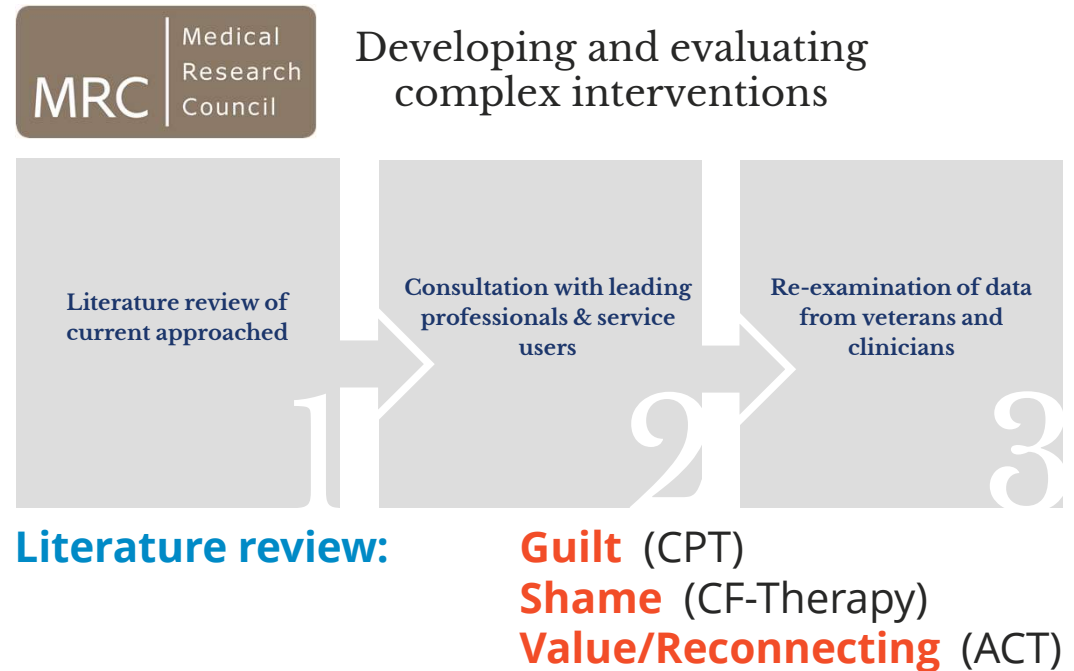
Developing a Treatment



Developing and evaluating complex interventions

TREATING MORAL INJURY

Stage 1: Review of Current Treatments



Allows for **strong theoretical underpinning** to manual design

Co-production to support feasibility & engagement

STAGE TWO: MORAL INJURY TREATMENT

Rebuilding and Reconnecting: Psychological Treatment After Challenging Events

Sessions 1-2	Sessions 3-8	Sessions 9-12	Sessions 13-18	Sessions 19-20
Resource building	Focusing on the event(s)	Moving on from the event(s)	Rebuilding connections	Ending
RB1 Formulation & treatment	FE3-5 Recounting the event	MO9-10 Core values & pre-event self	RC13-14 Raising self-compassion	E19 Tying it together
RB2 Emotional regulation	FE6-8 Evaluating the response to event	MO11-12 Reviewing changes	RC15-16 Restoring relationships	E20 Reviewing progress
			RC17-18 Renewal & reconnection	

STAGE THREE: MORAL INJURY PILOT

Pilot Study

Module delivered to
20 veterans
with Moral Injury
at Combat Stress

Severity of Moral
Injury-related
symptoms assessed
pre/post treatment

Patients followed up
at 3 months
post-treatment

Clinician and veterans
interviewed about
their views of module

Benefits of this approach

- Evidence of acceptability of the manual
- Tentative evidence for treatment outcomes
- Primary outcomes PTSD and Moral Injury

MORAL INJURY

Pilot Study – Feedback to Date

“Sometimes in treatments before they send you stuff and it’s so generic and it’s the same each week... whereas this one it’s given to you in bite sized chunks.”

Treatment generally well received

Timeline and letters seen as challenging but really worthwhile

“She’s able to share her screen and show me things... it explains it better... I think she’s been the best therapist I’ve had. I don’t have to worry what I tell her.”

Good therapeutic relationship is key

Clear explanations
Non-judgemental

“I like the information that she sends afterwards like it’s not too much but it’s enough and it’s got useful links... The worksheets are easy to print out and work through.”

Manageable homework

Including for those with adaptations (eg speech to text)

MORAL INJURY

Pilot Study – Feedback to Date

“I found it hard writing it and then I found it even harder reading it out... But I felt better afterwards and I feel like it has achieved something... So it helps put things into a bit of a better perspective.”

Exposure elements seemingly effective

Timeline and letters seen as challenging but really worthwhile

“I am able to open up a little bit more and just be a little bit kinder to myself... Conversations are getting better, softer and more understanding since starting this, which is fantastic.”

Family life has improved

Better anger management

More open spousal and familial relationships

“Explanatory audio files with homework (adaptation)”
“Spousal information leaflet on treatment”

Suggested improvements

THANKS FOR LISTENING

References for papers discussed available at
combatstress.org/research

Prof. Dominic Murphy

dominic.murphy@combatstress.org.uk

combatstress.org.uk/research

UKPTS.org

WHAT IS A MORAL INJURY?



Link to video:

https://youtu.be/QX8_QkNUoy8