

Moral Injury



Moral Injury:

“The pain that results from damage to a person’s moral foundation”

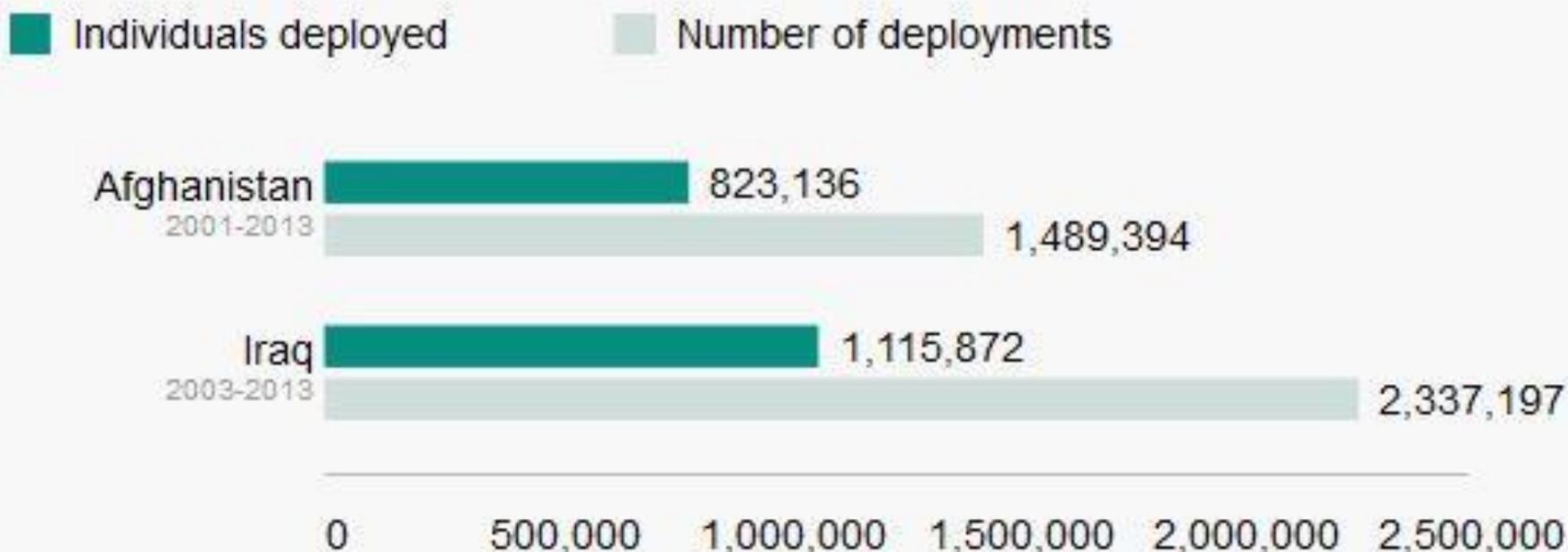
- “A violation of what each of us considers right or wrong.”
David Wood, *the Grunts*, Huffington Post
- “A deep sense of transgression including feelings of shame, grief, meaninglessness, and remorse from having violated core moral beliefs.” Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, Soul Repair
- “To violate your conscience is to commit moral suicide.”
Rev. Herman Keizer Jr, Colonel and Chaplain, U. S. Army, Ret.



Moral Injury is not officially recognized by the Defense Department. But it is moral injury, not PTSD, that is increasingly acknowledged as the signature wound of this generation of veterans: a bruise on the soul, akin to grief or sorrow, with lasting impact on the individuals and their families.

MULTIPLE DEPLOYMENTS FOR TROOPS IN RECENT WARS

Frequent deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq have become routine for American soldiers – raising the risk of lasting mental trauma.



Source: U.S. Department of Defense

PTSD

- The physical response to fear and danger, hyper-alertness and rise in adrenaline, necessary for survival in combat becomes an involuntary reaction to a remembered life threatening fear
- Triggered by crowds, noise, an argument
- Can be quickly diagnosed and therapy available

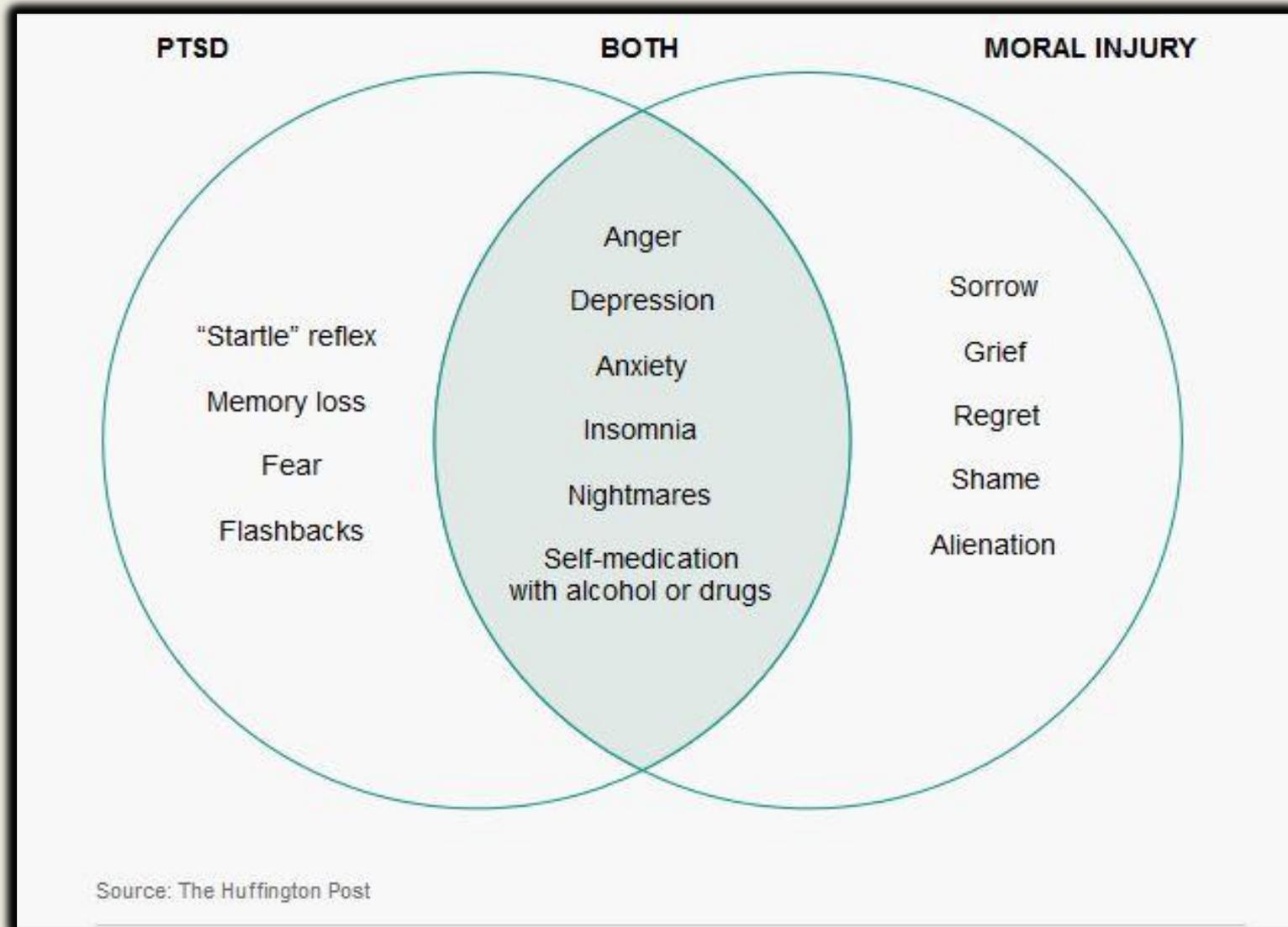
Moral Injury

Not fear but exposure - an experience or set of experiences that can provoke mild or intense grief, shame, or guilt

Sample Email from Service Member

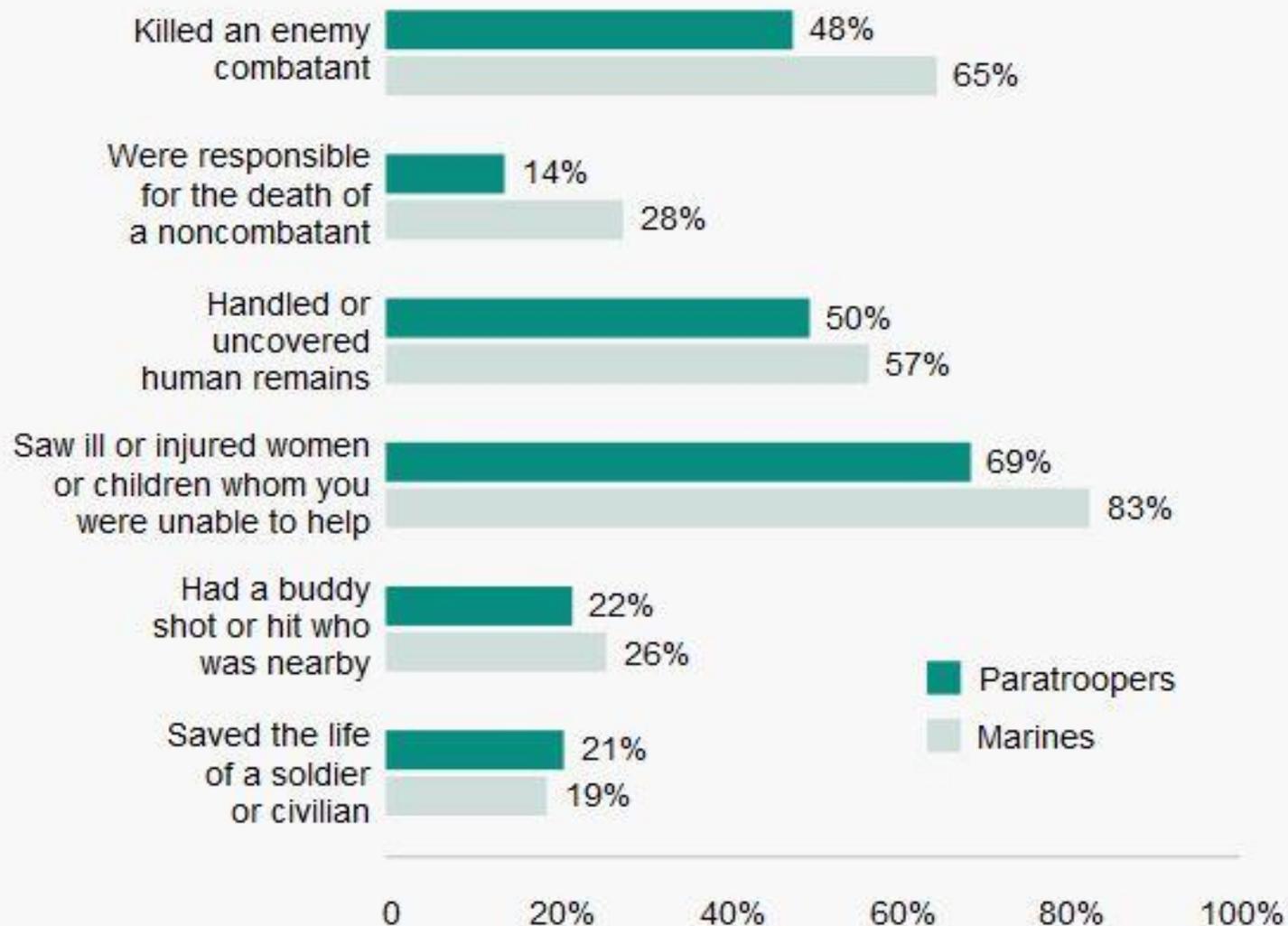
“I cannot handle being in the Army any longer, I need help to apply for CO. I feel I have a pretty good argument for CO status, non-religious based. I was deployed during 2012, involved in a Civilian Casualty incident that resulted in 3 dead civilians and two wounded. I returned from that deployment in October, 2012. Two days ago, I appeared at the hearing of the CIV-CAS incident and had to explain my full story and was asked questions about it. I feel as though I'm reliving the entire experience, feeling every bit of remorse for my actions. I cannot continue to do this anymore, I will not go back to war. If you can help me, it would be more than appreciated.”
(details were changed to protect identity)

War trauma symptoms: The symptoms of PTSD and Moral Injury and how they overlap



TROOPS SEE THINGS THEY CAN'T FORGET

A study of 3,761 paratroopers and Marines after their return from combat in Iraq in late 2003 found grim results about troops' exposure to morally damaging events.



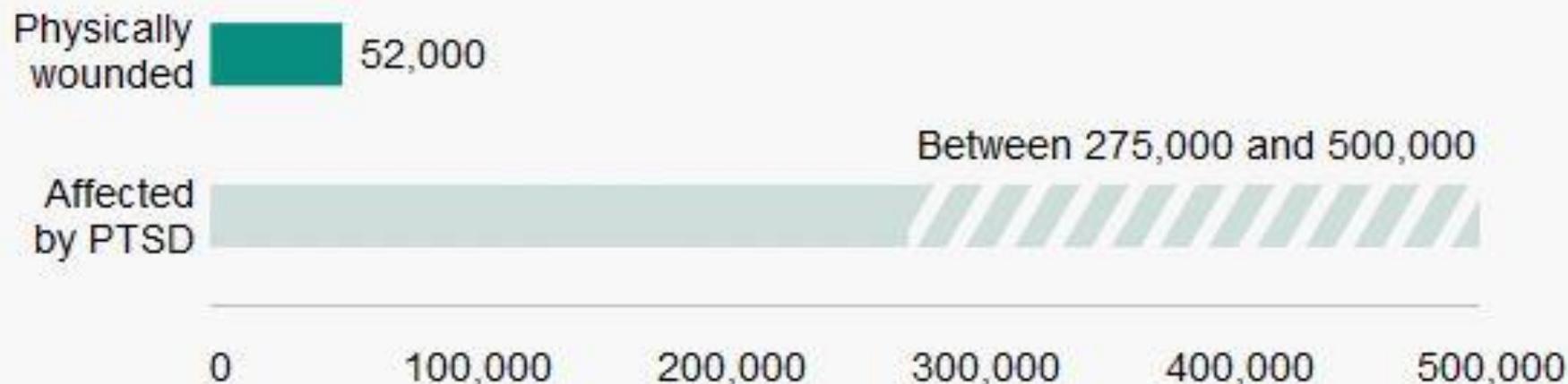
Factors worsening Moral Injury:

- Iraq and Afghanistan wars lack moral clarity
- Combat often takes place in civilian setting
- Difficulty in identifying combatant from civilian, including women and children
- Use of improvised explosive device kills and wounds with no visible combatant

A study early in Iraq War found that 2/3rds of deployed Marines killed an enemy combatant, more than half had handled human remains, and 28% felt responsible for the death of an Iraqi civilian

THE WOUNDS THAT DON'T SHOW

Mental health wounds far outnumbered physical injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan.



Source: U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

What is the military doing about it?

- “Resiliency” training before deployments: training in physical and psychological strengthening
- Embedding mental health care professionals into combat battalions
- Leaders are being trained to recognize soldiers under severe stress and get them help
- The Pentagon has funded a \$2 million clinical trial to explore adapting PTSD therapies for moral injury
- Defense Department and Veterans Administration have nothing specifically for Moral Injury, saying it’s “not defined” and that there is no “formal diagnosis” for it. However, they “provide a wide range of medical and non-medical resources.... in addressing it.”

Learning to live with Moral Injury

What helps?

- Treatments for PTSD do not work for Moral Injury (re-living event, medication, etc.)
- Focus on helping soldier accept that wrong was done, but that it need not define his/her life
- Makeshift rituals of cleansing and forgiveness
- Help soldier feel safe and comfortable and share his/her story with support and no judgment. Practice deep listening: listen from heart, without comments, relinquish your need of opinions, respect and embrace his/her truth and story
- Imaginary conversation with a compassionate moral authority

What Helps? (Continued)

- Support for healthy lifestyle
- Provide safe space for seating
- Learn to be with anger and grief
- Ask: “What can we do to support you?”
- Offer ways to make amends and create a new life purpose: disaster relief, peace missions, service projects, community service, acts of kindness
- Write imaginary letter of apology to those involved
- Encourage involvement in the arts

Government Help

For help with moral injury or other mental health issues

The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury's 24/7 live chat [outreach center](#) (also at 866-966-1020 or email resources@dcoeoutreach.org).

The Pentagon website [Military OneSource](#) for short-term, non-medical counseling.

Veterans can call, text or chat with the [Veterans Crisis Line](#). Dial 800-273-8255.

“Through our work on moral injury, we work to foster communities which can understand that war and its aftermath belong to all of us and are our responsibility. We believe that understanding moral injury can move our society into a different future.

We seek a future that sustains our society’s soul, the empathy and moral conscience that sustain our humanity.

We seek a society that faces danger by holding sacred the difficult assembling of meaning, the respect for truth, the alliance of heart and mind, and the construction of life-sustaining relationships so injured by war. And we know that with the help and commitment of many, we can face the fierce angel and make this future possible.”

Rita Nakashima Brock

References:

- *The Grunts: Damned if They Kill, Damned if They Don't*
by David Wood for Huffington Post:
<http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/moral-injury/the-grunts>
- Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War
By Rita Nakashima Brock and Gavbriella Lettini
<http://brite.edu/academics/programs/soul-repair/>