Moral Injury Among Professionals in K-12 Education

A Mixed Methods Inquiry

Erin P. Sugrue, MSW, MPP, LICSW

Introduction

Moral Injury = The lasting psychological, spiritual, social, and existential harm that results when one perpetrates or witnesses actions that violate deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.

Why study moral injury in the context of U.S. K-12 education?

Education is a morally high-stakes context

Exposure to morally injurious events can lead to emotional distress and potentially harmful behavioral outcomes.

The presence of moral injury signifies the presence of moral transgressions.

Research Questions

Q1: To what extent do K-12 public educators experience morally injurious events in their workplace?

Q2: What individual or school-level characteristics are associated with a K-12 public educator experiencing morally injurious events?

Q3: How might the phenomenon of “moral injury,” as experienced by educators, take shape in the context of K-12 public education?

Methods

Research Design

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods

Quantitative Sample

- N = 223

- 22.4% Male
- 77.6% Female

- 77.1% White
- 0.4% Native American
- 11.2% Multi-racial

- Mean yrs in Education = 14.9
- (1-44 years)

Quantitative Measures

- Moral Injury Events Scale – modified (MIES)
- Trauma-Related Guilt Inventory (TRGI)
- Stress of Conscience Questionnaire (SCQ)
- Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI)
- Intention to Leave Scale (ILS)
- Demographics

Qualitative Sample

- N = 21

- 2 Men
- 19 Women

- 15 White
- 1 African American
- 2 Asian American
- 1 Native American
- 2 Multi-racial

- Mean years in Education = 19.6
- (3-35 years)

Qualitative Measure

- 60-90 minute semi-structured interview

Discussion

- Moral injury is a relevant concept for K-12 professionals
- Most significant predictor of moral injury was the percent of students of color in a school
- Percent of students of color was highly correlated with the percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch (r = .963)
- Quantitative and qualitative data support the idea of the importance of “contextual injustices” (Levinson, 2015) in moral injury
- Qualitative data illustrate what McDonald (2017) refers to as the sense of “global loss” that is at the core of moral injury
- Moral injury among K-12 professionals indicates the presence of moral transgressions in our public schools. To address moral injury in K-12 education, we must work to identify and remedy the sources of moral transgressions.

Quantitative Results

MIES Scores

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Regression Analysis: MIES– Transgressions-Others

Adjusted $R^2 = .153$

%Students_of_Color

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Regression Analysis: MIES– Betrayal

Adjusted $R^2 = .094$

%Students_of_Color

The Trauma of Racism & Poverty

“Colonizing the Natives”

“Just Don’t Look Under the Hood”

The Fine Line Between Empathy & Pity