



TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE (TRIP) REPORT

Military REACH's review of THE MODERATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION IN THE RELATION BETWEEN POTENTIALLY MORALLY INJURIOUS EXPERIENCES AND ALCOHOL MISUSE AMONG MILITARY VETERANS

Forkus, S. R., Schick, M. R., Goncharenko, S., Thomas, E. D., Contractor, A. A., & Weiss, N. H. (2021). The moderating role of emotional dysregulation in the relation between potentially morally injurious experiences and alcohol misuse among military Veterans. *Military Psychology*, 33(1), 41-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2020.1842640>

BRIEF SUMMARY: Veterans may be at a high risk for experiencing *moral injuries* (i.e., engaging in or witnessing events that are against one's moral beliefs or experiencing a betrayal from trusted others [e.g., unit leaders, peers]). The emotional fallout of these incidents can be difficult to manage and may be linked to alcohol misuse. The current study examined whether *negative* and *positive emotion dysregulation* (i.e., difficulty understanding and managing emotions, as well as controlling impulses) may alter the association between *moral injuries* and *alcohol misuse* with a sample of 465 Veterans. Further, this study examined whether the type of moral injury impacted the associations among moral injury, emotion dysregulation, and alcohol misuse. Findings indicated that Veterans who experienced greater *moral injury* and *more emotion dysregulation* of negative and positive emotions also tended to report greater *alcohol misuse*.

KEY FINDINGS

- On average, when Veterans had high levels of *negative and positive emotion dysregulation*, greater *moral injuries* were associated with more *alcohol misuse*. For Veterans with low levels of negative and positive emotion dysregulation, moral injuries were generally not associated with alcohol misuse.
- The associations among moral injury, negative and positive emotion dysregulation, and alcohol misuse did not vary across the different types of moral injury (i.e., engaging in the moral injury, witnessing the moral injury, experiencing a perceived betrayal).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES

- Recognize that *moral injuries* can be emotionally complex and difficult to recover from. Discuss these experiences with trusted support figures, and/or encourage Veterans to seek guidance from a helping professional.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- Assist Veterans with processing beliefs and perspectives that are inhibiting their emotion regulation and help these Veterans cognitively and emotionally process moral injuries in an adaptive manner.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP

- Continue to advocate against alcohol as a coping mechanism for difficulties and provide trainings for healthy alternatives (e.g., exercise, counseling, spirituality, social support).

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ 465 Veterans; 43.4% reported alcohol misuse, 59.8% had moral injuries
- ✓ Mostly men (71.6%), White (69.5%), full-time employed (85.7%), married (60.1%), and with an average age of 38.0 years
- ✓ Army (63.7%), Navy, (9%), Air Force (18.9%), Marine Corps (6.2%), Coast Guard (1.3%)

METHODOLOGY

- Veterans were recruited and completed questionnaires through Amazon Mechanical Turk, which prescreened participants' Veteran identity.
- Veterans were excluded from the analysis if they failed any of the validity checks (i.e., attentiveness, test of military knowledge to verify that the questionnaire-taker was actually a Veteran), did not meet inclusion criteria (e.g., being 18+ years old), answered the questionnaires more than once, or failed to indicate exposure to a lifetime trauma.
- Veterans provided information regarding lifetime exposure to trauma, moral injuries, negative and positive emotion dysregulation, and alcohol misuse. Three types of moral injuries were assessed: 1) perpetrating a moral injury, 2) witnessing a moral injury, and 3) experiencing a betrayal. Additionally, Veterans reported on posttraumatic stress disorder symptom severity, which was included as a **control variable** in the analyses.
- Separate **moderation analyses** using multiple regression and bootstrapping were conducted for negative and positive emotion dysregulation to examine links among moral injuries, emotion dysregulation, and alcohol misuse, as well as to explore whether the type of moral injury altered the results. Simple slopes were analyzed at high and low levels of emotion dysregulation.

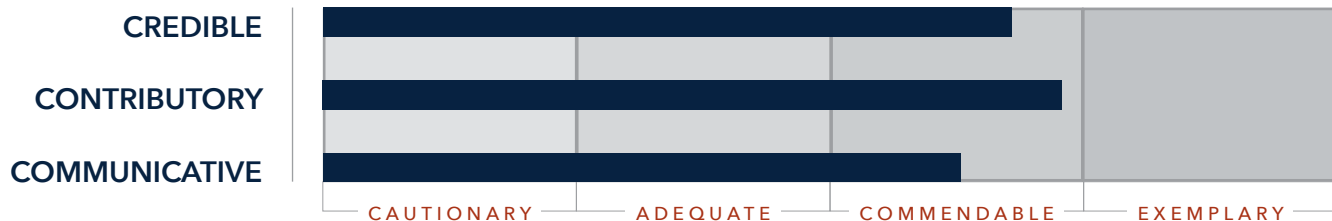
STRENGTHS

- This study extends knowledge on the links between moral injury and Veteran alcohol misuse by considering *positive* emotion dysregulation, which is often overlooked by researchers.
- The inclusion of validity checks in the survey helps to confirm the authenticity of the data.

LIMITATIONS

- The lack of information regarding important statistical considerations when performing moderation analyses (e.g., creation of the interaction terms, multicollinearity) limits the credibility of the analyses.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY



DIMENSIONS OF ASSESSMENT

- **CREDIBLE**: Research that is rigorous, transparent, consistent, and generalizable. This dimension reflects an evaluation of the study's scientific methodology.
 - **CONTRIBUTORY**: Research that is original, applicable, and has the potential to enhance the well-being of military families. This dimension examines the impact of the study.
 - **COMMUNICATIVE**: Research that is coherent, understandable, and readable. This dimension assesses how effectively the authors convey the content of the study.
- * These dimensions are adapted from the work of Mårtensson et al. (2016). For more information on the REACH evaluation framework and rubric visit: [MilitaryREACH.org](https://militaryreach.org)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Underlined terms in **red font** are linked to the definition in the Military REACH Dictionary. To explore more terms visit: <https://militaryreach.auburn.edu/DictionaryResult>. Terms in blue font are linked to additional resources.

PARTNERSHIP

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