

*Conference: Ethics and Humanitarian Research:
Generating Evidence Ethically*



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Moral distress among disaster responders, what is it, and can we do anything about it? -A scoping review

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Project organisation:

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Background:

There is a need to:

- Define the extent of moral challenges in disaster response
- Assess contributing factors to moral distress and how negative consequences can be prevented
- Raise awareness and knowledge about moral stress and its consequences



Project plan:

- Scoping review – clarify definitions 
- Focus group discussions – explore experiences
 - Responders from the Swedish Red Cross (SR), Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)
- Survey – assess level of responders' experiences
 - ProQL, MBI & IRI
- Intervention – preparatory training for disaster responders

Definitions of moral distress

- *“Moral distress arises when one know the right thing to do but institutional constrains make it nearly impossible to pursue the right course of action” (Jameton 1984).*
- *“Traditional negative stress symptoms that occurs due to situations that involve ethical dimensions and where the healthcare provider feels she/he is not able to preserve all interests and values at stake” (Kälvemark, Höglund & Hansson 2004).*

Aim:

To elucidate how the concept of moral distress in disaster response is defined and explained in the literature.

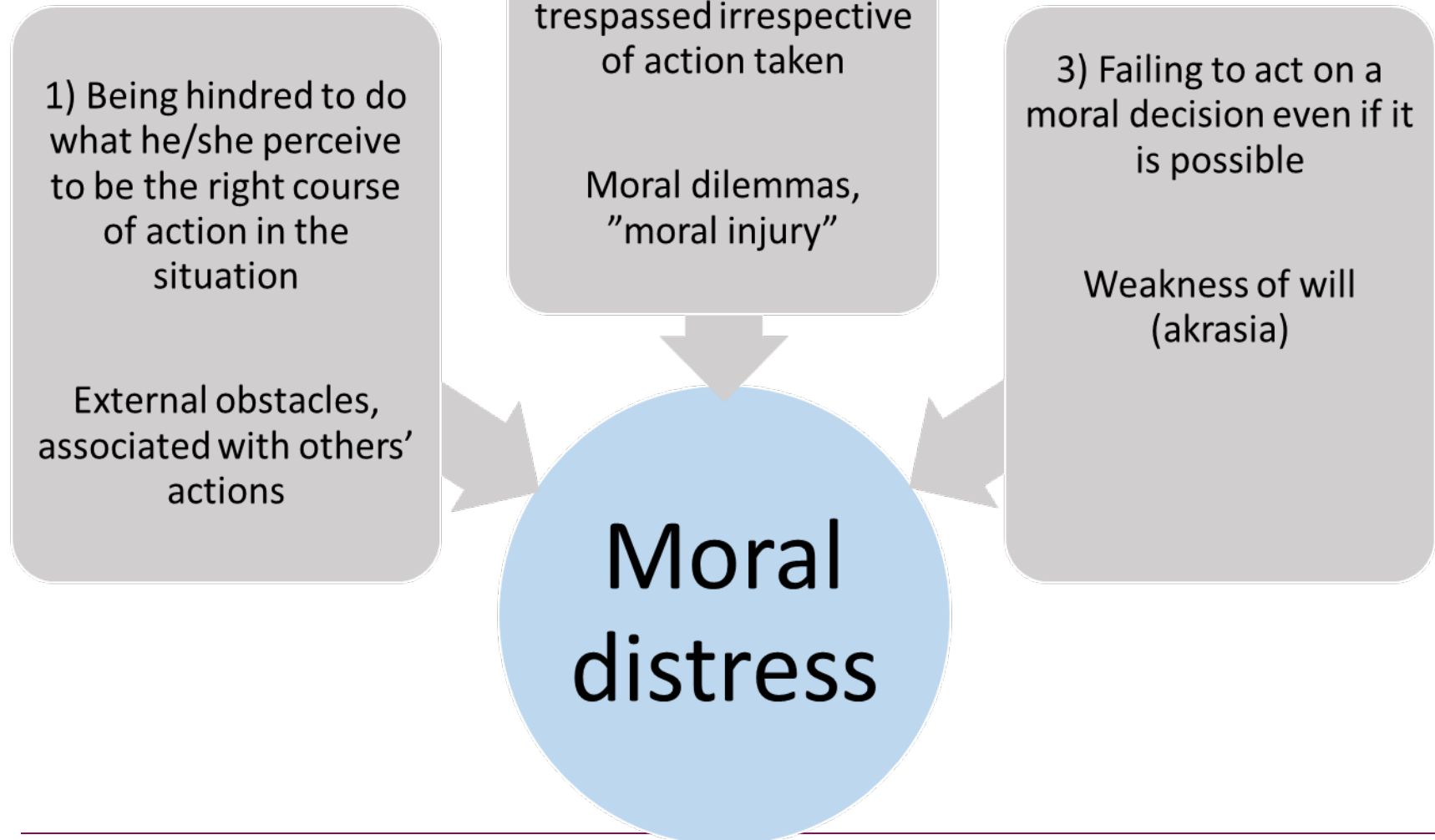
Result:

Moral distress can be summarized as

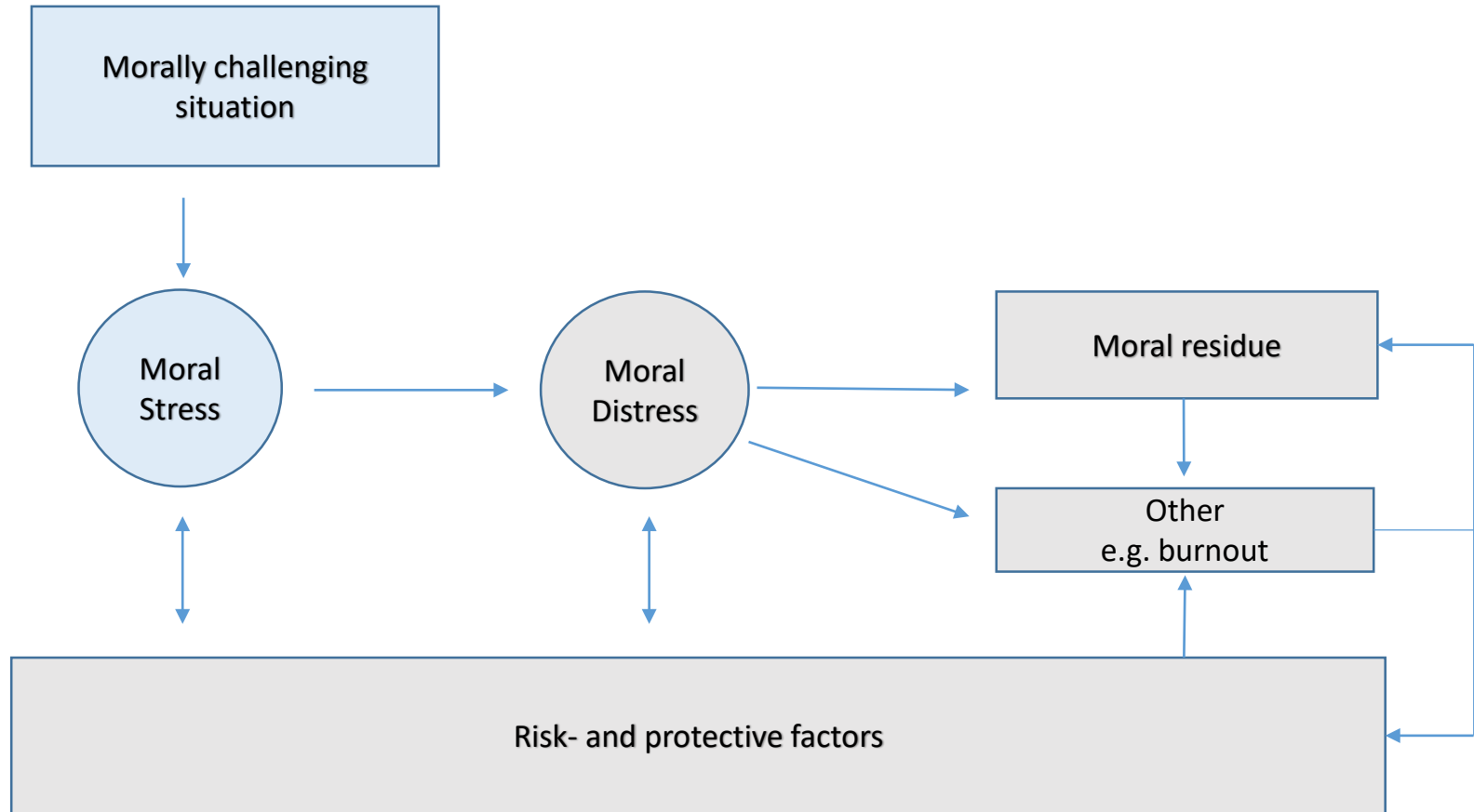
“a stressful reaction developed when the responder cannot due to different reasons follow inner moral values in various situations within disaster response”.

- Moral stress, moral distress, ethical distress, complex humanitarian distress describe the same phenomenon
- Three different types of definitions were used among the literature of disaster response
- A conceptual model was developed based on the results

Three different types of definitions of moral distress in disaster response:



Conceptual model: the development of moral distress and its consequences



Result cont.

Moral stress:

A common reaction that includes feelings of frustration and powerlessness developed during morally challenging situations when individuals are prevented from acting in accordance with their values and ideals.

Moral distress:

The negative stress reaction that may develop in the aftermath if the responder cannot find constructive solutions or receive support.

Secondary consequences:

Lingering unmitigated MD may result in negative consequences, including those that concern moral aspects, such as moral residue and other more general psychological consequences e.g. burnout.

Areas of moral challenges within disaster response & humanitarian contexts

Contextual	Political, social, historical and commercial structures Cultural aspects, religious and traditional beliefs
Organizational	Policies, restrictions & decisions, projects targeting specific patients. Uneven provision of aid, information and coordination-gaps
Professional	Acting outside of competence, forced to provide lower quality of care, difficulties to obtain autonomy and informed consent
Resources	Lack of time, supplies, trained staff & infrastructure. →Priorities, triage, choose between acute/long-term consequences, public health vs individualized care
Teamwork	Power discrepancies between international/national staff, hierarchal relationship between professions, watching misconduct, abuse of power towards patients/colleagues

How can it be alleviated?

Protective factors

External

- ✓ Formal support, social support, long-term support
- ✓ Preparedness and training
- ✓ Culture of openness for ethical reflection & discussion, trust in team members

Internal

- ✓ Realistic motivation, work satisfaction
- ✓ Capacity for stress management
- ✓ Moral courage, experience of earlier resolved moral challenges

"Dealing with tough situations" – the experiences of moral challenges among disaster responders

Poster presentation at the conference: Ethics and Humanitarian Research – generating evidence ethically, Ohio University 25-26 of March 2019

TACK!



How are moral challenges among disaster responders perceived and dealt with?

- Healthcare responders reported that moral challenges are predominant in disaster settings and affected wellbeing both during and after the response.
- This depended on the severity, the repetitive encounter and the duration of the morally challenging situation.
- Further they reported that it was up to the individual to find constructive solutions and support to manage encountered moral challenges.
- If left without support or not able to resolve the situation it led to consequences such as moral distress and affected wellbeing.

Method

Four focus group discussions were conducted in spring 2018 with 12 Swedish nurses and doctors from Médecins sans Frontières, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency and the Swedish Red Cross. Thematic analysis resulted in four themes that influenced handling moral challenges during and after response: "tools and support", "perception of professional role and engagement", "other stress factors" and "type of situation".

Aim

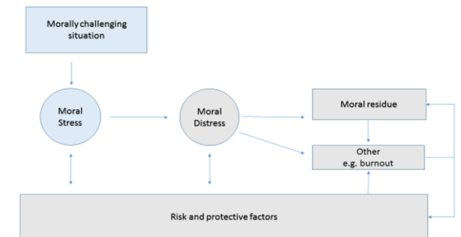
This study explored how moral challenges are perceived and dealt with, and possibly influence wellbeing among disaster responders when working within international disaster response over the last five years.

Conclusion

The preliminary findings recommend that disaster responders need to be both professionally and personally better prepared for managing moral challenges. Furthermore, formal support from the organizations needs to be appropriate to the needs and available during the response, as well as after.

"Ethical challenges and moral stress in disaster response"

- an interdisciplinary research project in disastermedicine, psychotraumatology and ethics
- funded by the National Board of Health and Welfare



Conceptual model of the development of moral distress

Moral distress, what is it?

- Healthcare responders perceived situations where they felt they were hindered to act upon own moral values; "morally challenging situations".
- This caused feelings of powerlessness, frustration, anger and sadness; "moral stress".
- When not being able to resolve or not finding support it can lead to "moral distress".
- Depending on available risk- and protective factors moral distress might lead to negative consequences, such as burnout.

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