Healthcare Salute
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Understanding Moral Injury in Healthcare Providers who worked in Long-Term Care during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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COVID-19's signature wound: moral injury

The psychological, social, and spiritual distress that results from experiencing a violation of deeply held moral and values

Moral Injury is the outcome of exposure to potentially morally injurious event(s) (PMIEs):

- Actions or inactions which transgress moral values
- Witnessing the actions or inactions of someone else that violates their morals
- Betrayal by a trusted authority

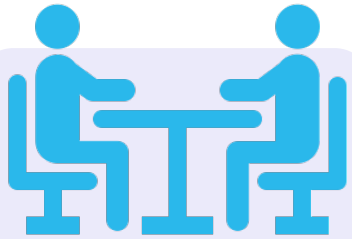
Methods

Recruitment

Canadian healthcare workers who were directly or indirectly involved in patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online Questionnaires

Questionnaires were completed via REDCAP from April 2021 to January 2023..



Interview

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with interested participants.

Analysis

Thematic analysis (interview transcripts) was conducted.

System Abandonment

I felt we were just left exposed because ***we were told not to wear masks, we were told not to order equipment****, it had to be saved the hospitals. And as we're struggling in the middle of it when there was so many people sick, staff were sick and the whole thing. And then every time you turned on the radio or the television or open the newspaper,* ***long-term care was being slammed as being the bad guys. We weren't prepared****. And the ministry did their very, very best to back away and say that it was the long-term care homes that were at fault.* ***You were doing the best you could and the ministry was slamming down, your partner was slamming you down and then the media just really was the icing on the cake. I*** *mean, it didn't matter where you went, that long term care was being* ***abused and accused and found guilty***. 75HCP

- Feeling Neglected
- Taking the Blame

I Didn't Sign Up for This

…getting the body ready with my fellow leadership member, I did it three times and we just don't, ***we've never seen that side. I'm part of palliative care, so I've seen death, but I've never seen that,*** *so, and to see that black bag zipped up and we couldn't even put our dignity blanket over it, because of COVID risk. So, that's where the moral injury came in there, is* ***I couldn't even walk this resident out like we would normally, with the family following us and the team, and we had a song playing and a dignity blanket, but that was all taken away with COVID****.* 307HCP

- Going Above and Beyond
- Lack of Training and Preparation

Unable to Provide Adequate Care

"I would say just isolating people. So isolating people that – a lot of residents are unwell. And they were living out their last lives, like last days. And – or they were, they couldn't understand the situation. ***I think just being unable to treat people with dignity.....*** *We couldn't even visit them without masks on. We couldn't visit them without our eyes covered, or our clothes covered. We couldn't even go into their rooms at some points. So it – I think it was just – it was not a dignified way to live for them. I know many of them felt like they were in jail. I just – I felt – I don't think that it was it was the best situation.* ***I think it was very traumatizing for many of them. And I don't know. Obviously. it was traumatizing for us too."*** (311 HCW)

- Forced to isolate residents
- Not able to give residents adequate attention
- Having to let residents die alone

Mental Health Impact- Moral Injury

"I'm part of palliative care, so I've seen death, but I've never seen that, so, and to see that black bag zipped up and we couldn't even put our dignity blanket over it, because of COVID risk. ***So, that's where the moral injury came in there,*** *is I couldn't even walk this resident out like we would normally, with the family following us and the team, and we had a song playing and a dignity blanket, but that was all taken away with COVID."* (307 HCW)

- Guilt
- Helpless to watch people suffer
- Unable to provide dignity in death
- Trauma
- Lack of Support

Organizational Culture

"And like I said, [location] would like their – they would just like us all to be gone. That makes it easier for them to pretend that nothing happened. I think they don't care if we're broken." (146 HCW)

- HCWs in LTC as disposable
  - Fracturing of teams
- Residents as numbers rather than people
  - Secrecy and lack of communication

Key Findings and Next Steps

- Broad range and types of potentially morally injurious events (PMIEs) were reported during COVID-19
- PMIEs were experienced at multiple levels (patient-related, organizational, system, public)
- Most PMIEs were experienced as deep betrayals by the organization, system, and public
- HCPs described anger, frustration, and sadness
- Many HCPs in LTC felt their knowledge and expertise was devalued and ignored during Covid.
- Increased mental health resources and supports are needed to improve awareness among HCP and organizations.

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