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# Moral Injury-Current research & clinical implications

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# Who we are

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We are a team of research and clinical psychologists who conduct research with, and provide treatment to, people from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds.

We want to learn more about the experiences of refugees and asylum-seekers in order to improve policy, practice and service provision in the future.



# Outline

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**01** What is moral injury?

**02** Moral injury research in refugees

**03** Clinical implications

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# What is Moral Injury?

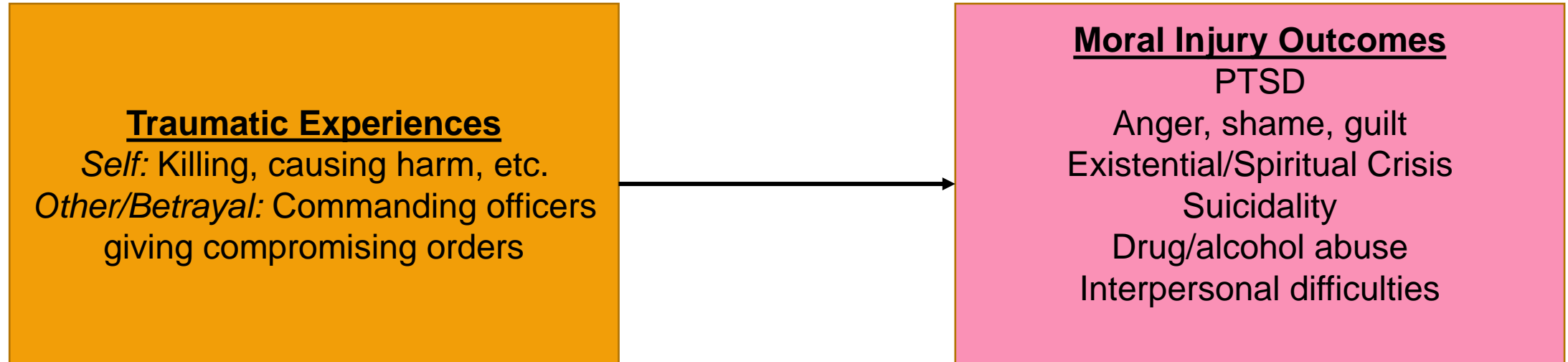
# Moral Injury



‘the lasting psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations’

(Litz et al., 2009, p. 697)

# Moral Injury in military research



- These events were not responding in therapy the same way as other fear-based events.
- Challenging cognitions was ineffective or inappropriate

# Moral Injury Questions

1. How does Moral Injury fit with PTSD?
2. What are the symptoms of moral injury?
3. Are existing treatments sufficient?
4. Is moral injury relevant for other populations?

02

# Moral Injury Research in Refugee Populations



# Moral Injury in a refugee context

1. Wartime context
2. Quick decisions have to be made in high-stakes situations
3. Interpersonal nature of refugee trauma
4. Symptoms go beyond fear and are similar to what is associated with moral injury (i.e., PTSD, anger, guilt, shame, existential crisis, suicidality, etc)

“A refugee has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”



# Moral Injury in a refugee context

## Traumatic Experiences

- Rape
- Betrayal by community member
- Murder of family member
- Leaving an elderly relative behind
- Betraying a neighbour to protect your family
- Forced perpetration as a child soldier

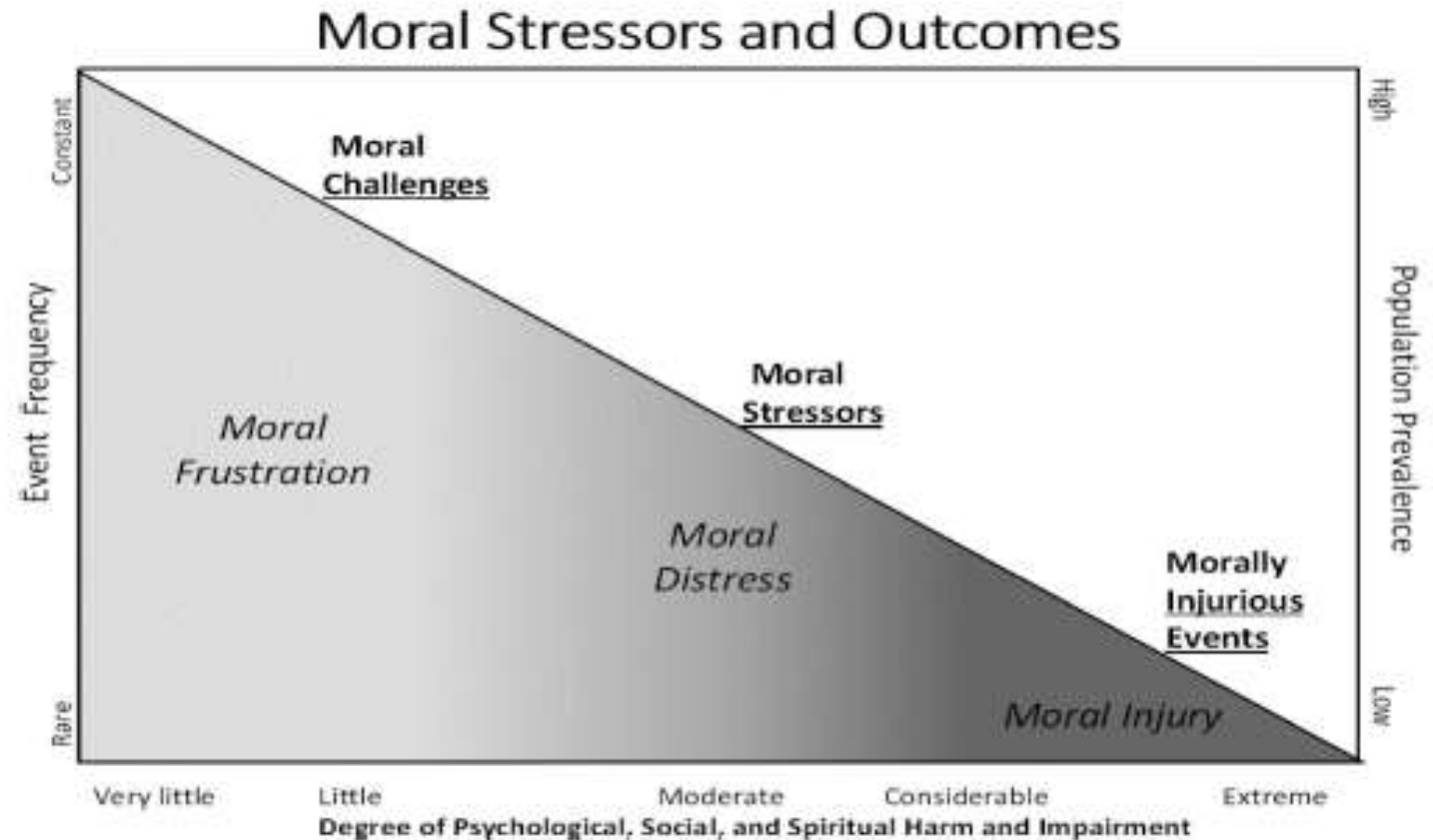


Figure 1. Heuristic continuum of morally relevant life experiences and corresponding responses.

# Moral Injury in a refugee context

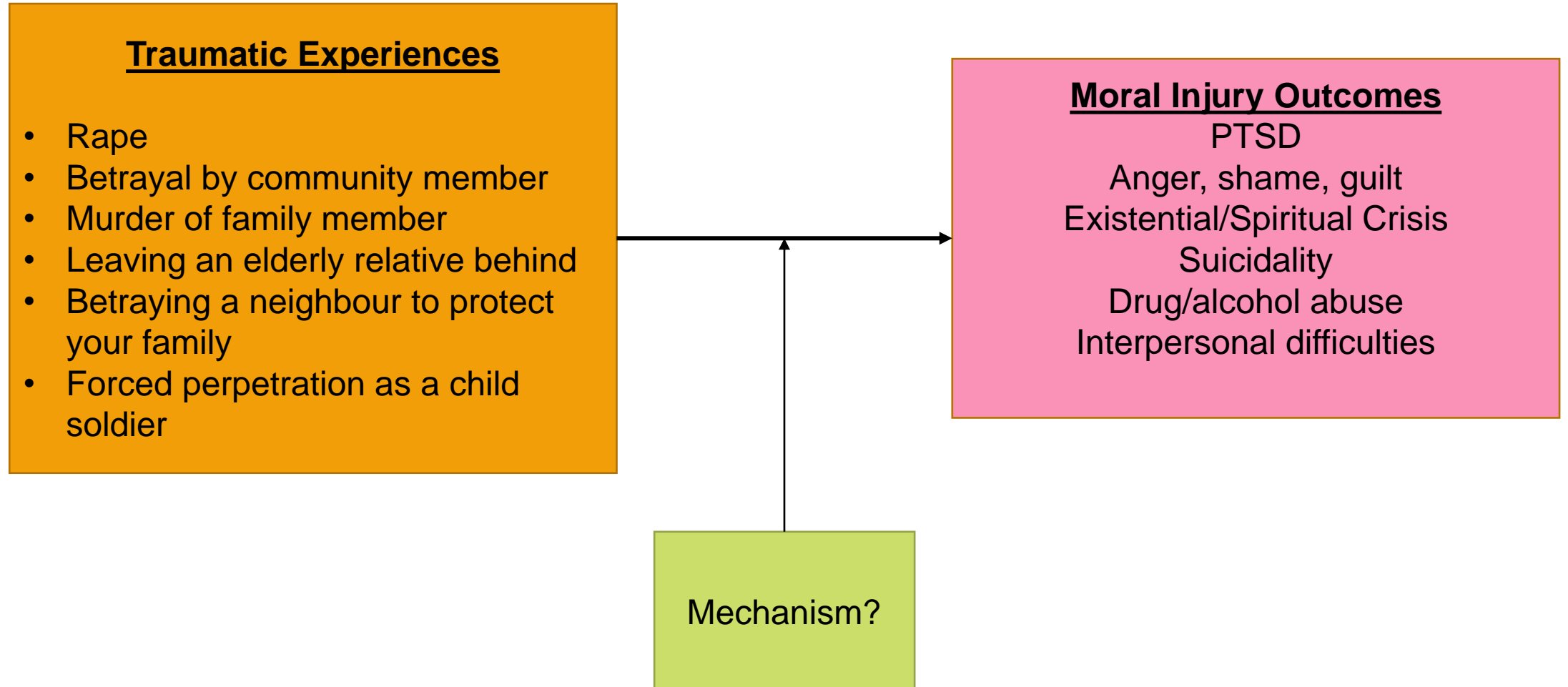
## Traumatic Experiences

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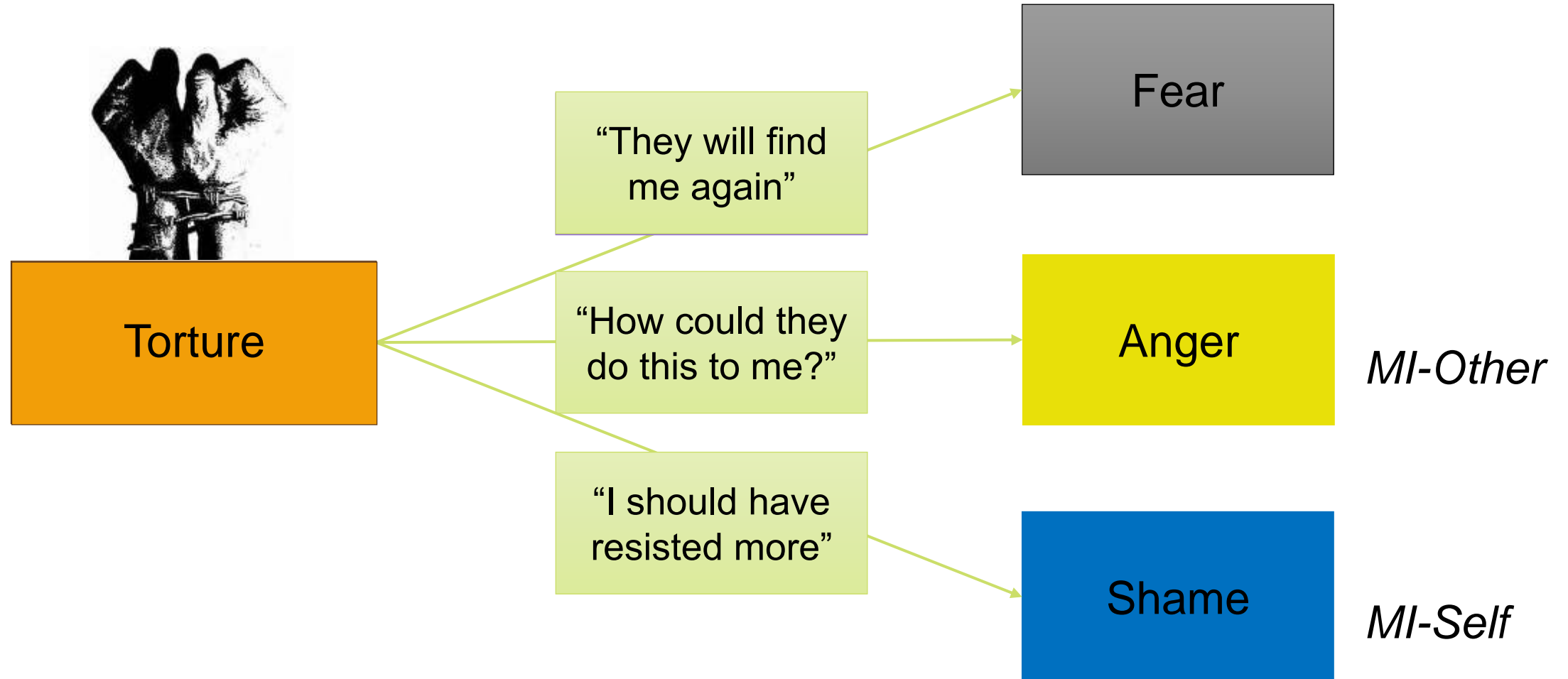
## Moral Injury Outcomes

PTSD  
Anger, shame, guilt  
Existential/Spiritual Crisis  
Suicidality  
Drug/alcohol abuse  
Interpersonal difficulties

# Moral Injury in a refugee context



# Moral Injury = Appraisal Process



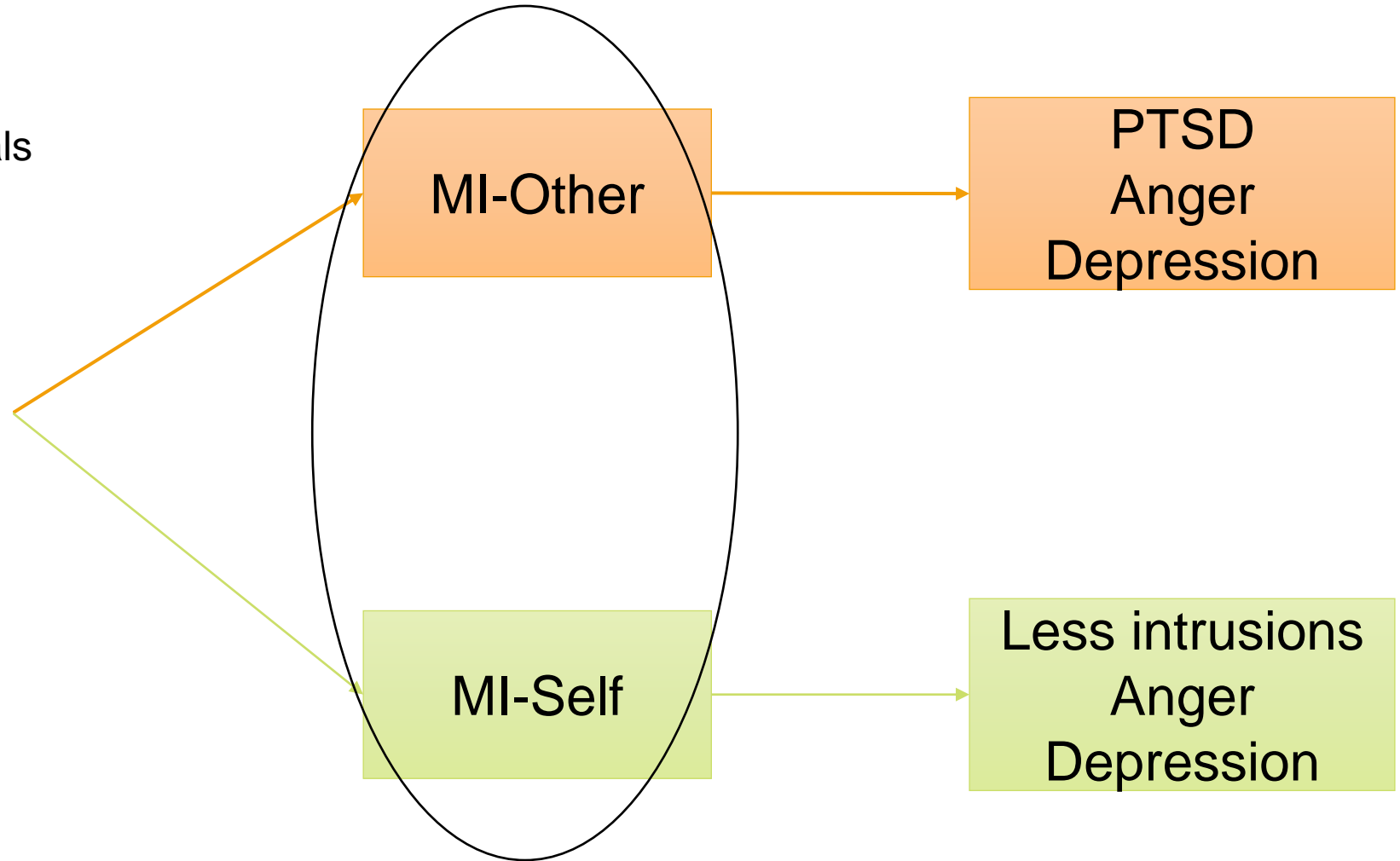
# Moral Injury Appraisal Scale

Moral Injury Appraisals Scale  
(Hoffman, Liddell, Bryant, & Nickerson 2018)

		Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Very much
1.	I am troubled by morally wrong things done by other people	1	2	3	4
2.	I am troubled because I saw other people do things that were morally wrong	1	2	3	4
3.	I am troubled because I heard about other people doing things that were morally wrong	1	2	3	4
4.	I am troubled because other people have acted against important moral rules	1	2	3	4
5.	I am troubled because I did things that were morally wrong	1	2	3	4
6.	I am troubled because I acted against important moral rules.	1	2	3	4
7.	I am troubled by morally wrong things I have done.	1	2	3	4
8.	I went against my own morals by failing to do something I should have done.	1	2	3	4
9.	I am troubled because I acted in ways that went against my own moral code or values	1	2	3	4

# Moral Injury Appraisals

Moral Injury Appraisals  
Scale (MIAS)



# Latent Profile Analysis

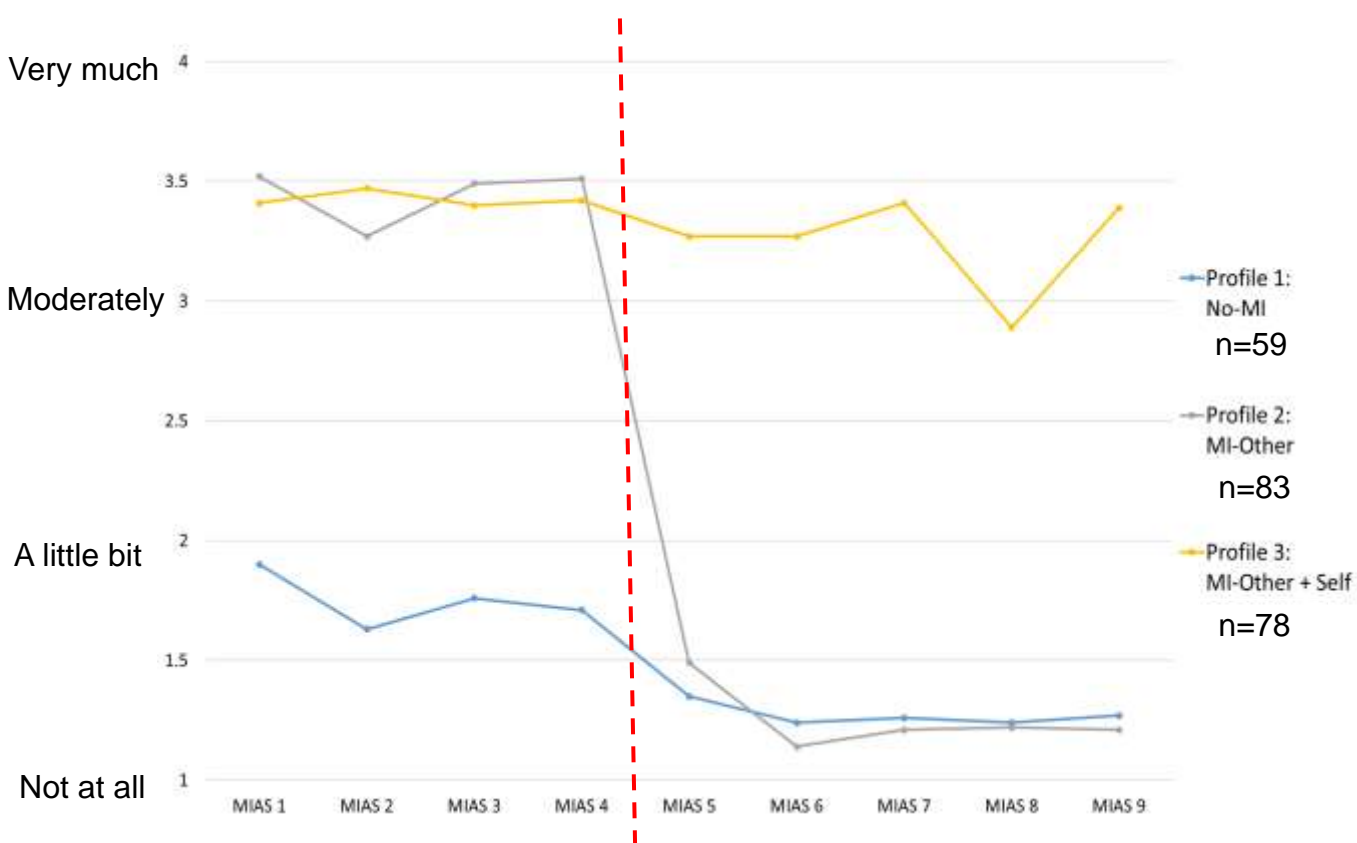


## Hypothesized profiles:





# Latent Profile Analysis of Moral Injury Appraisals



		Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Very much
1.	I am troubled by morally wrong things done by other people	1	2	3	4
2.	I am troubled because I saw other people do things that were morally wrong	1	2	3	4
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8.	I went against my own morals by failing to do something I should have done.	1	2	3	4
9.	I am troubled because I acted in ways that went against my own moral code or values	1	2	3	4

# Discussion: Psychological outcomes

MI-Other

MI-Other + Self

No-MI

- Moral injury overall → Higher PTSD, anger, depression and suicidal ideation
- Moral injury-Other + Self → Higher anger and depression

# Discussion: Predictors of Profiles

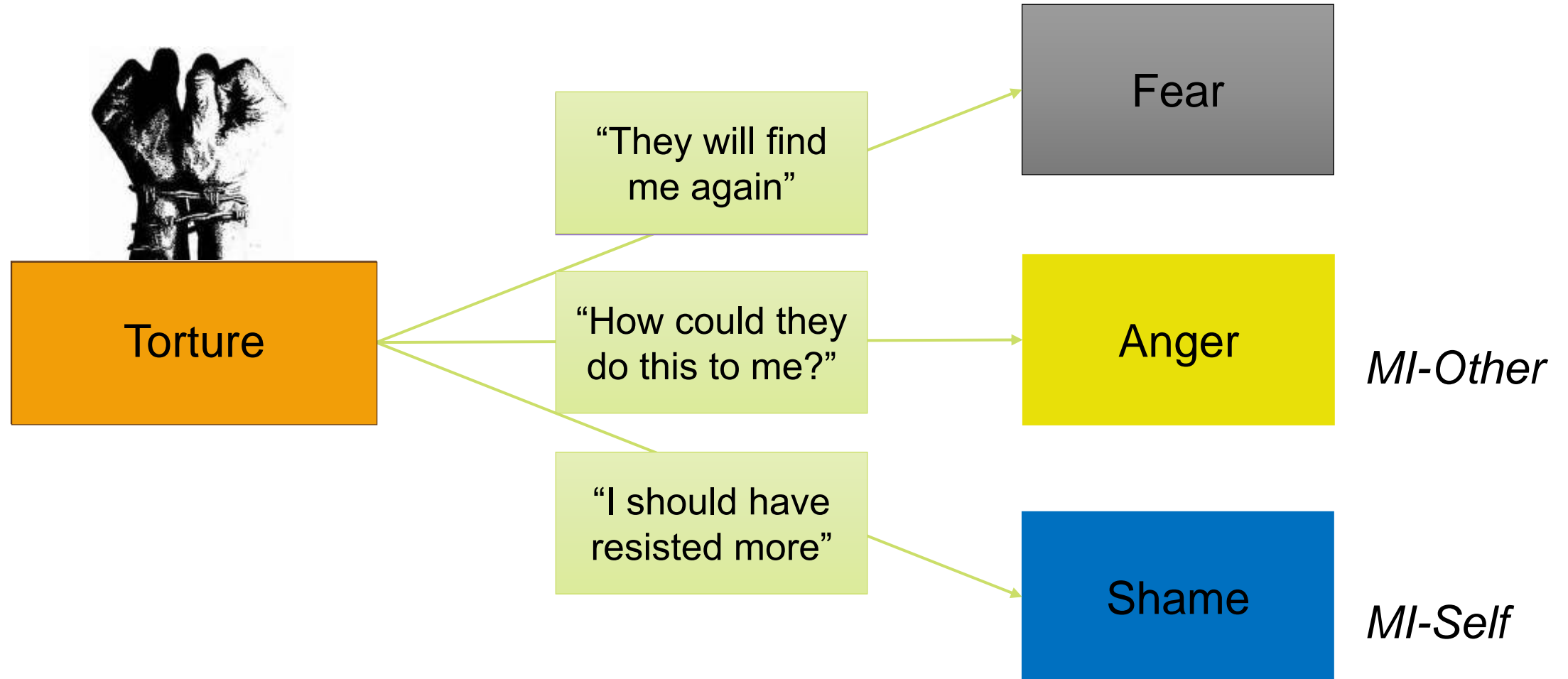
MI-Other

MI-Other + Self

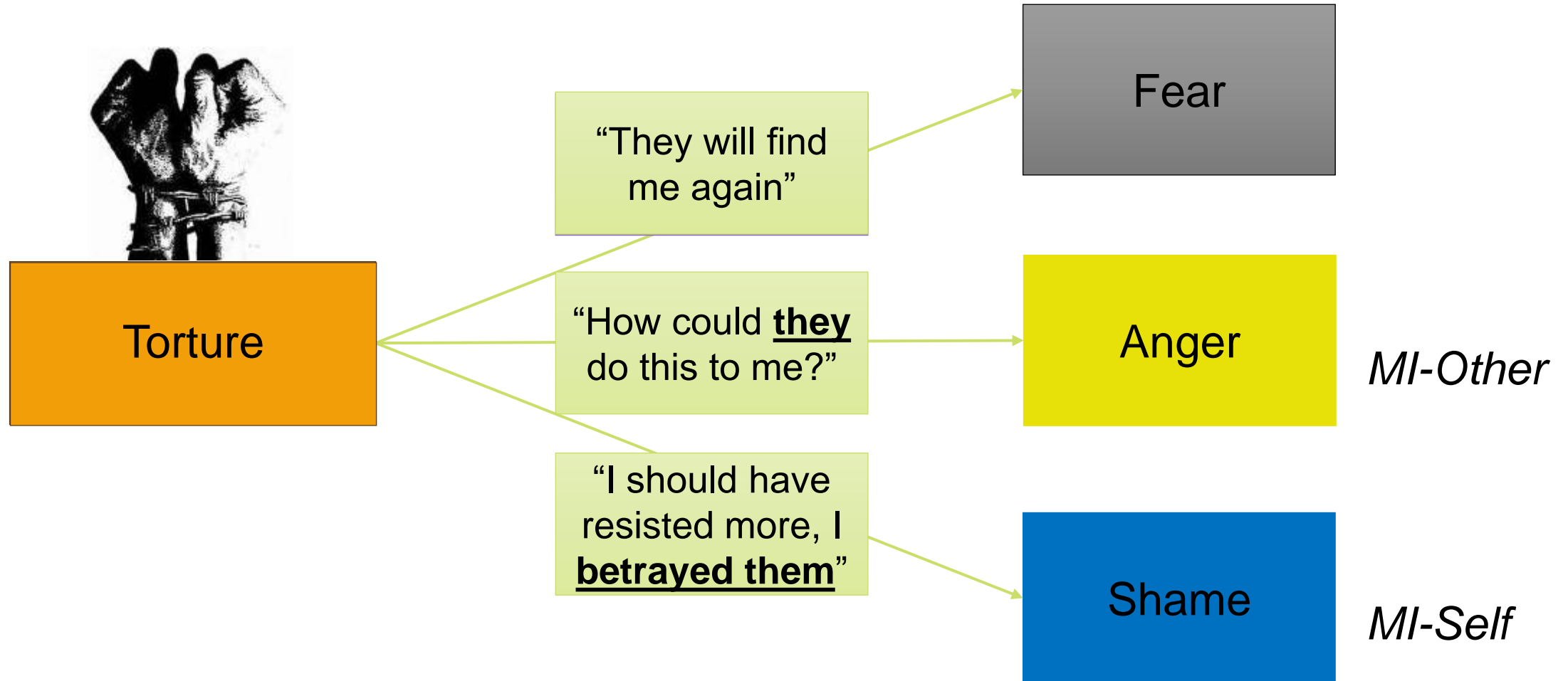
No-MI

- Trauma events only distinguished MI: Other + Self
- Distinguished by exposure to abuse (non-perpetration)
- Accurate vs inaccurate appraisals
- Association with non-traumatic events (living difficulties)
- Living difficulties = high likelihood of reoccurrence

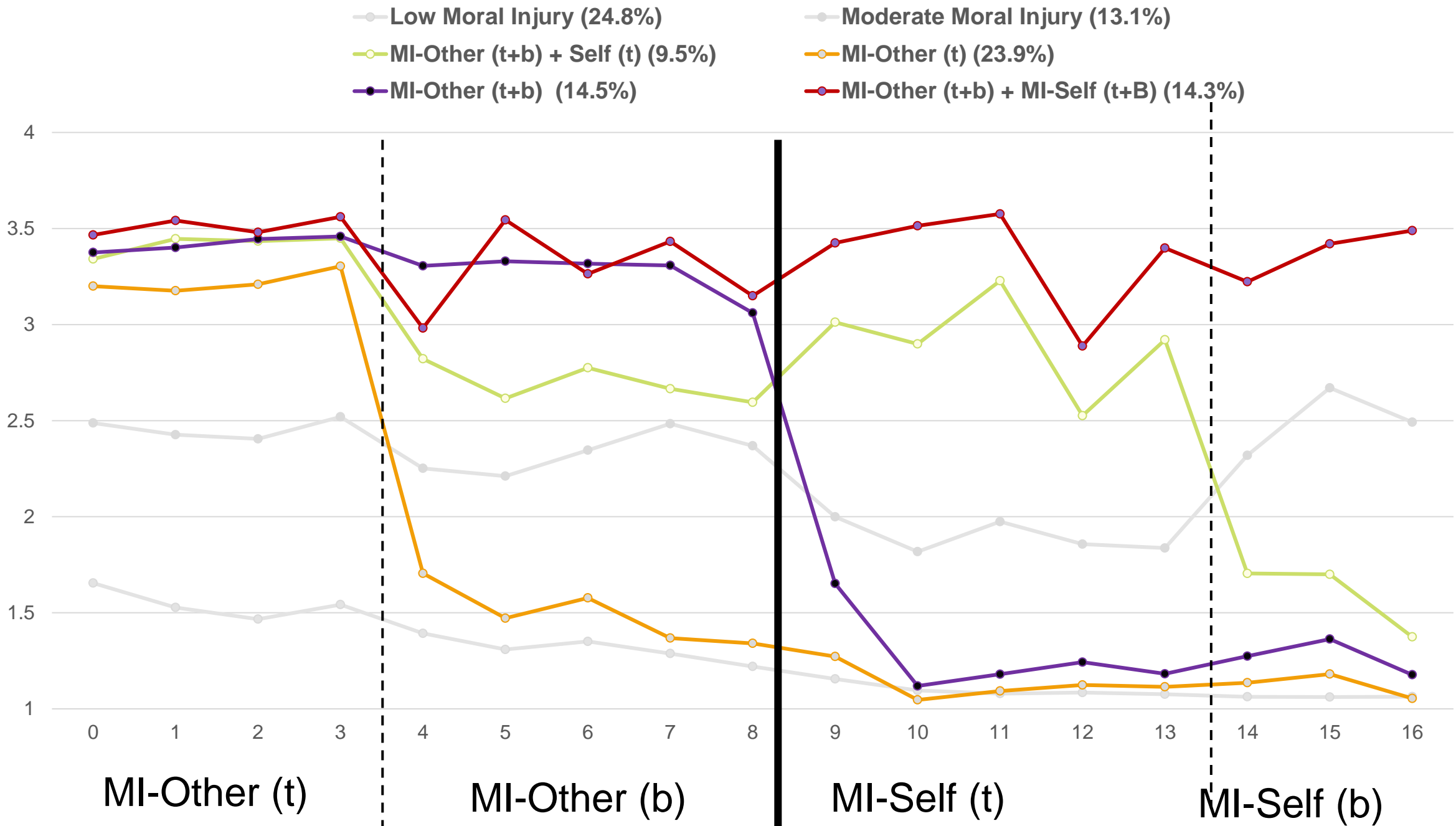
# Moral Injury = Appraisal Process



# Moral Injury (Betrayal) = Appraisal Process



MIAS		
I am troubled by morally wrong things done by other people	Transgressions	MI-Other
I am troubled because I saw other people do things that were morally wrong		
I am troubled because I heard about other people doing things that were morally wrong		
I am troubled because other people have acted against important moral rules		
I feel betrayed by people I trusted	Betrayal	
I am troubled because people I trusted, failed me		
I am troubled because people I trusted, didn't help me when I needed it		
I am troubled because people I trusted, acted in ways that harmed me		
I am troubled because people I trusted, failed to protect me	Transgressions	MI-Self
I am troubled because I did things that were morally wrong		
I am troubled because I acted against important moral rules		
I am troubled by morally wrong things I have done		
I violated my own morals by failing to do something I should have done		
I am troubled because I acted in ways that violated my own moral code or values	Betrayal	
I am troubled because I failed people who trusted me		
I am troubled because I didn't help people who trusted me		
I am troubled because I acted in ways that harmed people who trusted me		
I am troubled because I failed to protect people who trusted me		



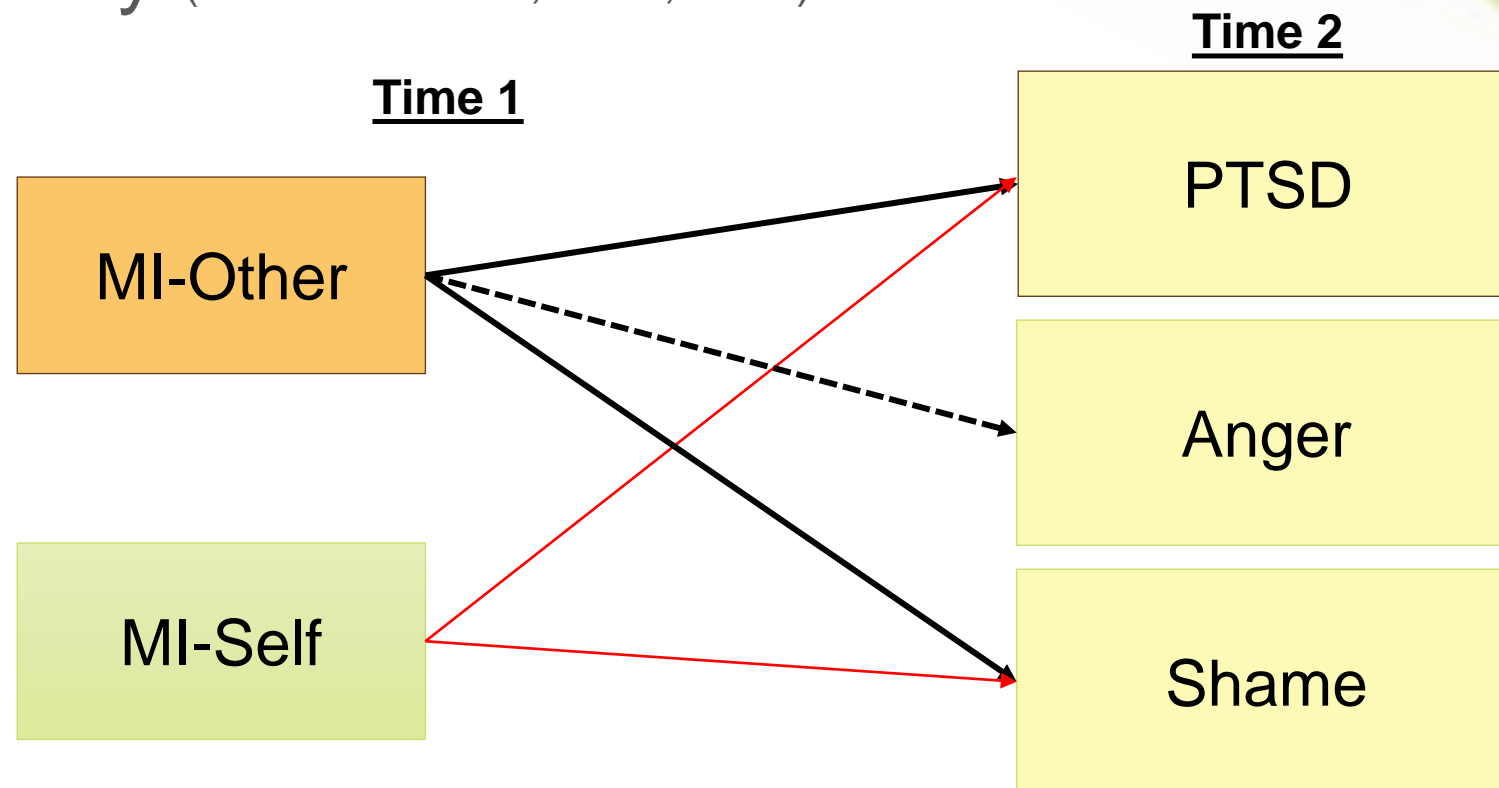
# Results

- All moral injury profiles indicated greater psychopathology than those without MI appraisals
- MI-Other was associated with PTSD, depression, suicidal ideation, anger, shame and guilt
- When MI-Self appraisals were added it was associated with greater shame and guilt.
- For profiles with betrayal appraisals associations with psychological outcomes was event greater.
- Betrayal represents a more severe form of moral injury appraisals compared to general transgressions



# The causal role of appraisals

1. Experimentally → how do beliefs about moral actions impact your memories and emotions (Hoffman & Nickerson, 2020, 2021a, 2021b)
2. Longitudinally (Nickerson et al., 2018, 2020)



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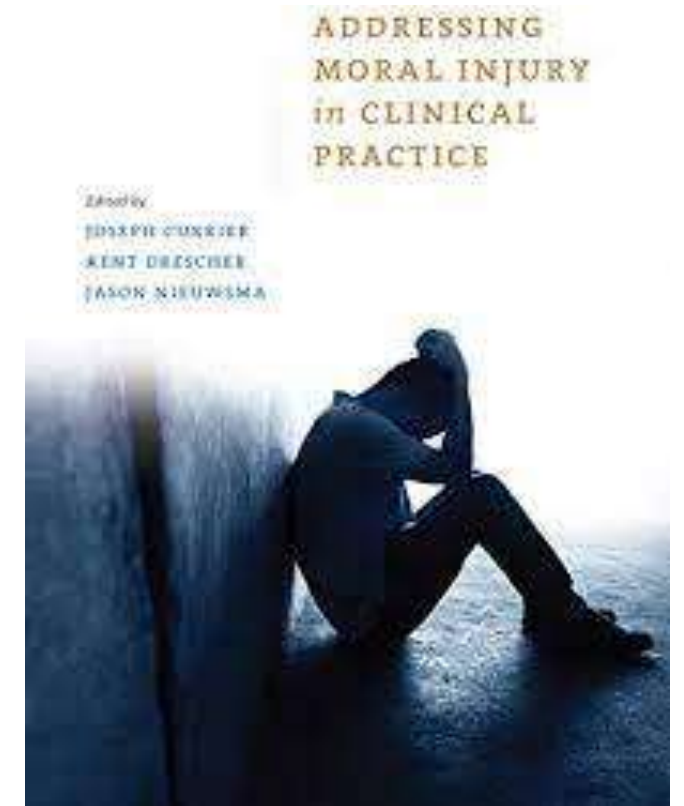
# Clinical Implications

# Treatment implications

- We need treatments that can include but go beyond fear
  - Debate whether existing trauma-focused therapies already do this (CPT, PE)
- We need to understand the mechanism of moral injury → what is it that we are treating?
  - Moral appraisals → we need to understand the moral, cultural and relational context of these beliefs.
  - We need to understand who people believe is responsible for an event (may be more than one person, and may be difficult to elicit → shame)
- Accurate or distorted?
  - We need to be open and gentle when exploring cognitive distortions (i.e., blame)
  - We need tools of working with accurate appraisals of events

# Moral Injury – Treatment options

- Adaptive Disclosure (Litz et al., 2009)
  - Psychological processing of memory of moral transgression and its meaning (don't expect habituation)
  - Exposure to corrective information (i.e., dialogue with benevolent moral authority)
- Impact of Killing (Maguen et al., 2017)
  - Focus on forgiveness (primarily self-forgiveness)
  - Write a letter to the person who has been wronged
  - Making amends
- ACT (Farnsworth et al., 2017)
  - Acceptance of emotional experience
  - Functional impact of emotions on goals



# RTRP Moral Injury Treatment- Overview

- 12 x 90min weekly sessions
- Treatment components:
  - Psychoeducation
  - Narrative Exposure Therapy adapted to identify and process morally injurious experiences
  - Culturally-informed Cognitive Therapy
    - Distorted appraisals
    - Accurate appraisals-Acceptance/Self-forgiveness/Building trust
  - Reconnecting with Community

Moral Injury  
Treatment for  
Refugees (MIT-R)

THANK  
YOU

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