

Effects of Positive Psychology–Based Interventions on PTSD and Moral Injury Symptoms: A Systematic Review

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REVIEW TITLE AND BASIC DETAILS

Review title

Effects of Positive Psychology–Based Interventions on PTSD and Moral Injury Symptoms: A Systematic Review

Condition or domain being studied

Moral Distress; Posttraumatic Stress Disorder; Potentially Morally Injurious Event; Post-trauma Response

Rationale for the review

Veterans, first responders, and healthcare personnel face high rates of moral injury and PTSD symptoms due to repeated exposure to traumatic events, life-or-death decision making, and ethical dilemmas. Positive psychology interventions offer a promising framework for fostering meaning and social reintegration, yet evidence remains limited within our most vulnerable populations. This review is being conducted to synthesize evidence across these high-risk groups to determine if treatments integrating positive psychology principles improve social functioning and quality of life more effectively than standard care alone. This will provide practitioners with a clearer evidence base for trauma recovery.

Review objectives

How does the integration of positive psychology principles compared to standard clinical/therapeutic care affect PTSD or moral injury symptoms, social functioning, and quality of life?

Keywords

Veterans; Soldiers; Active duty; Nurses; Physicians; Medical staff; Police; Firefighters; Paramedic; EMS; PTSD; Post-traumatic stress disorder; Moral injury; Moral distress; Social functioning; Reintegration; Occupational therapy; Life satisfaction

Country

United States of America; Canada

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Population

Included

Humans, Veterans, Healthcare personnel, First responders, Any gender, Any Rank, Any Branch, Above 21 years of age

Excluded

Personnel under the age of 21, Personnel not from the United States, Personnel not experiencing mental-health issues, adolescence

Intervention(s) or exposure(s)

Included

Compassion-focused therapy; Forgiveness Facilitation; Logotherapy; Self-care Interventions; Mindfulness; Acceptance And Commitment Therapy ; Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; Humanistic Psychotherapy; Spiritual Therapy; Counseling About Spiritual Distress; Psychotherapy

Psychological treatments integrating the principles of positive psychology including: meaning-making, posttraumatic growth, moral repair, compassion, forgiveness, values clarification, loving-kindness, and strength-based treatments, and acts of kindness.

Comparator(s) or control(s)

Included

PICO tags selected: Usual Care; Waiting list control

Study design

Both randomized and nonrandomized study types will be included.

Included

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), Cluster RCTs, Quasi-experimental studies with comparison group, Non-randomized controlled trials, Controlled before–after studies, Pragmatic clinical trials

Excluded

Case reports / case series, Cross-sectional studies, Qualitative-only studies, Reviews, commentaries, protocols, Purely observational cohort studies without an intervention

Context

This review will include studies involving veterans, first responders, and healthcare personnel across the United States or closely-related countries such as Canada. We will prioritize studies conducted in professional or clinical settings where interventions are aimed at trauma recovery and moral repair. Studies will be included regardless of whether the intervention was delivered individually or in a group format.

SIMILAR REVIEWS

Check for similar records already in PROSPERO

PROSPERO identified a number of existing PROSPERO records that were similar to this one (last check made on 16 February 2026). These are shown below along with the reasons given by that the review team for the reviews being different and/or proceeding.

- The effects of positive psychology interventions on psychiatric symptoms: a systematic review and meta-analysis [published 19 October 2024] [CRD42024598367]. The review was acknowledged as **similar** but the authors opted to continue because *there are differences in population, the review looks at additional or different outcomes*
- The effects of multicomponent positive psychology interventions on well-being in adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis [published 25 November 2019] [CRD42019139586]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- The effectiveness of positive psychology interventions on fatigue, sleep quality, optimism and quality of life in patients with cancer: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials [published 17 August 2022] [CRD42022350834]. The review was acknowledged as **similar** but the authors opted to continue because *there are differences in population, the review looks at additional or different outcomes*

TIMELINE OF THE REVIEW

Date of first submission to PROSPERO

This record has not been submitted.

Review timeline

Start date: 16 February 2026. End date: 21 April 2026.

Date of registration in PROSPERO

This record has not been published.

AVAILABILITY OF FULL PROTOCOL

Availability of full protocol

A full protocol has been written and uploaded to PROSPERO. The protocol may be accessed through this link <https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPEROFILES/8b51a97db349c8fa531ef58be9d7f81b.pdf>.

SEARCHING AND SCREENING

Search for unpublished studies

Both published and unpublished studies will be sought.

Main bibliographic databases that will be searched

The main databases to be searched are *PsycInfo*, *PubMed* and *Scopus*.

Other important or specialist databases that will be searched

Pro-Quest

Search language restrictions

The review will only include studies published in English.

Search date restrictions

There are no search date restrictions.

Other methods of identifying studies

Other studies will be identified by: *reference list checking (backward citation searching)*, *searching dissertation and thesis databases* and *searching trial or study registers*.

Link to search strategy

A full search strategy is available in the full protocol as described in the *Availability of full protocol* section

Selection process

Studies will be screened independently by at least two people (or person/machine combination) with a process to resolve differences.

Other relevant information about searching and screening

Data will be extracted using a standardized form and will include study design, participant characteristics, intervention details, group descriptive statistics, outcomes measured, and study results. Two reviewers will independently extract data, assess potential bias, and resolve discrepancies through discussion. Studies with substantial bias or misinformation will be excluded from analysis.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Data extraction from published articles and reports

Data will be extracted independently by at least two people (or person/machine combination) with a process to resolve differences.

Authors will not be contacted for further information.

Study risk of bias or quality assessment

Risk of bias will be assessed using: *Cochrane RoB-2* and *ROBINS-I*

Data will be assessed independently by at least two people (or person/machine combination) with a process to resolve differences.

Additional information will be sought from study investigators if required information is unclear or unavailable in the study publications/reports.

Reporting bias assessment

Cochrane RoB-2 and ROBINS-I will be used to assess for bias due to missing results.

Certainty assessment

The overall certainty of evidence of the body of evidence will be assessed using Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) methodology. The following domains will be assessed: risk of bias, consistency, directness, precision and publication bias. Judgements will include high, moderate, low and very low.

OUTCOMES TO BE ANALYSED

Main outcomes

Reduction of PTSD symptoms using validated instruments such as the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS-5), PTSD Checklist (PCL-5), or equivalent.

Reduction of moral injury symptoms using validated instruments such as the Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES), Moral Injury Symptom Scale–Military (MISS-M), or other validated moral injury questionnaires.

Additional outcomes

Increased quality of life as measured by the SF-36, WHOQOL-BREF, or EQ-5D.

Increased social functioning as measured by the Social Adjustment Scale or WHO Disability Assessment Schedule

PLANNED DATA SYNTHESIS

Strategy for data synthesis

A formal narrative synthesis of the included studies will be conducted. This will involve systematically summarizing the characteristics of the studies, including population, intervention type, comparator, study design, and measured outcomes. Patterns, trends, and differences in the effectiveness of positive psychology–based interventions for PTSD or moral injury will be highlighted. The synthesis will also consider the influence of study quality and risk of bias on findings. Results will be presented in structured tables and descriptive text to facilitate clear comparison across interventions, populations, and outcomes.

CURRENT REVIEW STAGE

Stage of the review at this submission

Review stage	Started	Completed
Pilot work		
Formal searching/study identification		
Screening search results against inclusion criteria		
Data extraction or receipt of IPD		
Risk of bias/quality assessment		
Data synthesis		

Review status

The review is currently planned or ongoing.

Publication of review results

Results of the review will be published in English.

REVIEW AFFILIATION, FUNDING AND PEER REVIEW

Review team members

Mr Landon Cox (review guarantor and contact) ORCID: 0009-0000-3996-4980. Tarleton State University. United States of America.

No conflict of interest declared.

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No conflict of interest declared.

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Review affiliation

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Funding source

Review has no funding and no agreed support from an academic institution and is done in authors' own time.

Peer review

There has been no peer review of this planned review.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Review conflict of interest

Declared individual interests are recorded under team member details.. No additional interests are recorded for this review.

Medical Subject Headings

Empathy; Forgiveness; Meditation; Posttraumatic Growth, Psychological; Psychology, Positive; Quality of Life; Stress Disorders, Post-Traumatic; Veterans; Emergency Medical Technicians; Health Personnel; Resilience, Psychological

PROSPERO version history

No preview available

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