

MORAL INJURY AND EMOTIONAL EATING AS RESPONSES TO COLLECTIVE WAR TRAUMA AMONG ISRAELI MEN

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Research Overview

The October 7th attacks and the ensuing war have imposed severe psychological strain on Israeli men, whose distress is often masked by "stoic" gender norms that inhibit traditional help-seeking (Levant & Richmond, 2007). Beyond classic psychopathology, Moral Injury (MI) and Emotional Eating (EE) emerge as critical, yet under-detected, factors. MI represents the deep psychological distress resulting from actions or witnesses that violate core moral beliefs (Litz et al., 2009). Concurrently, EE may serve as a "silent" somatic regulatory mechanism, where food is used to modulate intense, unexpressed emotions (Papadopoulos et al., 2022). This study investigates how these factors intersect within distinct psychological typologies, offering a more nuanced view of male vulnerability during prolonged national trauma.

Research Objective

To identify distinct typologies of psychological distress and regulation among Israeli men during the war. This study specifically examines the intersection of Moral Injury (MI) and Emotional Eating (EE) as unique indicators of male vulnerability and somatic coping.

Methodology

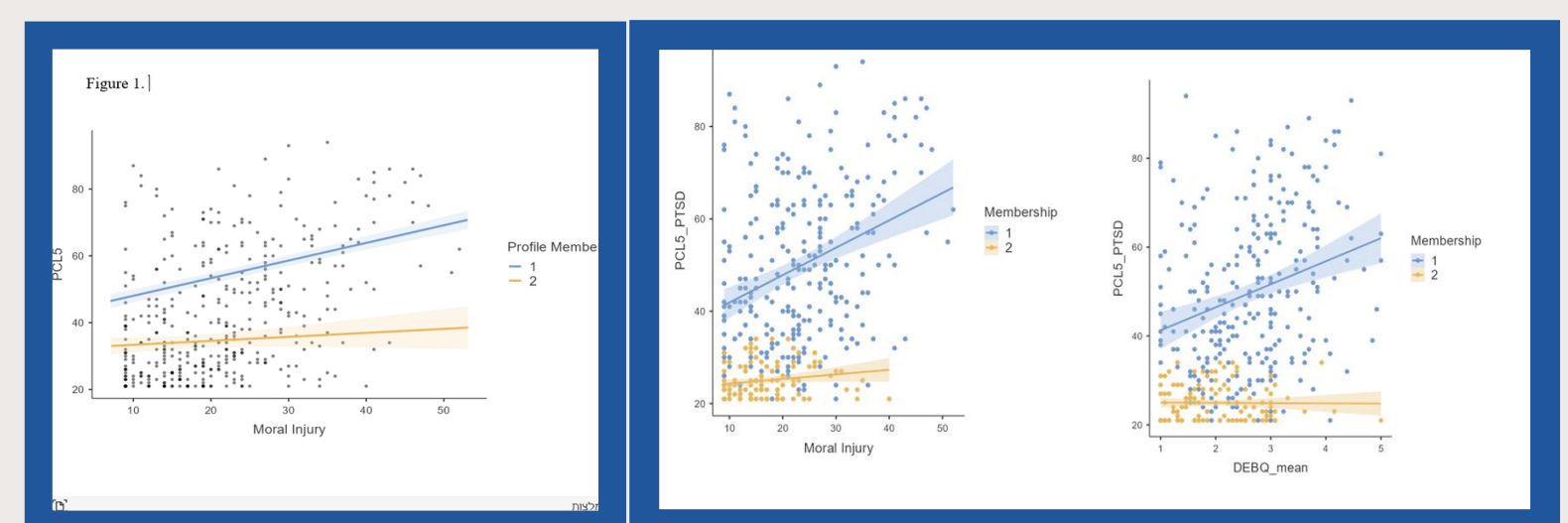
The study employed a cross-sectional design with 404 Israeli men ($M=39.9$) during the ongoing conflict. Assessment included validated instruments: PCL-5 for PTSD (Weathers et al., 2013), DASS-21 for depression, anxiety, and stress (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), the Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES; Nash et al., 2013), and the Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire (DEBQ; Van Strien et al., 1986) for emotional eating. Data were analyzed using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to identify adjustment typologies, with multinomial logistic regression to examine the predictive role of sociodemographics, MI, and EE.

Results

1. **Latent Profile Analysis:** Two distinct typologies emerged:

- Vulnerable-Symptomatic (66.3%): High levels of PTSD and psychopathology, associated with direct war exposure and economic instability.
- Resilient-Functional (33.7%): Low symptom levels, buffered by marital status and religious affiliation.

2. **Path Analysis:** The structural model revealed that Moral Injury (MI) and Emotional Eating (EE) are not just correlates but key indicators of distress. In the vulnerable group, MI and EE were significantly associated with symptom severity ($p < .05$), suggesting that EE serves as a "silent" somatic regulatory channel for men dealing with moral and psychological trauma.



Conclusion

- Hidden Distress: The link between emotional eating and psychopathology suggests that men utilize food as a somatic regulatory channel to manage unexpressed emotional pain.
- Beyond PTSD: Clinical screenings must expand to include these "silent" behavioral indicators, as traditional PTSD measures may miss the full scope of male vulnerability.
- Context Matters: Moral injury significantly intensifies the psychological burden, requiring interventions that address the existential and moral violations inherent in war.
- Protective Factors: Marriage and religious affiliation serve as primary buffers, emphasizing the role of social and communal belonging in maintaining resilience.

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