

SADDER BUT WISER: HELPING PATIENTS DEAL WITH MORAL INJURY USING EMDR THERAPY

Jackie June ter Heide

Background and aims: Some professionals, such as military service members or first responders, deal with morally challenging situations on a day-to-day basis. Moral injury is a relatively new concept that refers to the psychosocial consequences of involvement in high stakes situations where moral beliefs and expectations are transgressed. Following such situations, people may experience a strong dissonance between their moral convictions and the reality of their experience, resulting in negative beliefs about themselves, others and the world; strong feelings of guilt and shame; social withdrawal; PTSD-symptoms such as recurrent nightmares; and self-defeating behaviour. In order to help patients live with their experiences of moral injury, EMDR therapy may be helpful. It may be used to adjust inaccurate cognitions about the event (such as hindsight bias or overestimation of guilt) or broader negative attributions (such as perceiving oneself as worthless or bad). To that end, case conceptualisation, cognitive interweaves and future templates may be employed that focus specifically on moral injury. In addition, EMDR therapy may need to be embedded in a broader therapeutic framework that encompasses other techniques to help patients heal from moral injury. The aim of this keynote is to acquaint EMDR therapists with the concept of moral injury and with EMDR interventions that may help patients heal from moral injury.

Methods: Moral injury and its treatment are discussed using clinical case examples, research and video material.

Learning objectives: at the end of this keynote, participants

- Are familiar with the concept of moral injury, especially in patients who work in high stakes professions;
- Know how to focus their EMDR case conceptualization, cognitive interweaves and future templates on healing moral injury;
- Know how EMDR may be included in a broader therapeutic framework to help patients heal from moral injury.