

Soul Injury; How Stressful Experiences from the Past and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Can Become Exacerbated at the End of Life and Complicating Peaceful Dying

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Relevance:

"Evidence-based spiritual care is the use of scientific evidence on spirituality to inform the decisions and interventions in the spiritual care of persons. Although it is not straightforward to evaluate spiritual care practice it is important to construct research in order to improve the quality of care..."

George Fitchett, 2015 Caring for the Human Spirit Conference, HealthCare Chaplaincy Network

Soul Injury addresses:

- Unmourned Loss
- Unforgiven Guilt and Shame

Aim: Spiritual Care providers are confronted with patients diagnosed with PTSD or patients who have had stressful or traumatic experiences, such as for example refugees, soldiers, first responders, victims of physical and mental violence (i.e. bullying, rape, molestation), victims of environmental disaster, terror etc. Also, professionals in Europe need to become sensitized how such stressful experiences may complicate peaceful dying. *Soul Injury*, stoicism and PTSD are a few issues that need to be considered.

Method: The study contains a CAS paper and educational trainings that informed about the unique care needs of patients struggling to overcome events from the past by utilizing a concept that has come to be known as *Soul Injury*. At the trainings, participants learned how stressful experiences from the past or PTSD

may exacerbate and influence End of Life Care. An overlooked wound, identified as *Soul Injury*, is explained and brought into the context of Spiritual Care. Questionnaires were answered by the participants of the trainings, to determine the applicability of *Soul Injury* in Europe. The trainings took place at the University in Berne and in other cities in Switzerland.

Results: Participants understood why unmourned loss, shame and unforgiven guilt can become a lifetime burden. Interestingly, the evaluation showed that 87% of the participants thought that they may know someone with a *Soul Injury* and are more prepared to support them with the understanding gained.

Conclusion: The outcome demonstrated that the tools and knowledge about the concept of *Soul Injury* were valuable in the attendee's professional and private lives. Thus, the understanding of its tools (i.e. Anchoring Heart Technique), was confirmed as professional, yet simple in its application. Moreover, the results suggest that Spiritual Care and generally End of Life Care providers in Europe could benefit from the lessons of *Soul Injury*.

Future research Soul Injury:

Aim: How and why the symptoms from a *Soul Injury* in Europe (Finland, UK, Switzerland, Germany, Austria) differ to the USA. **Method:** An „easy to take“ online survey. Visit and try it out today: www.surveynow.ch



Evaluation:

- Finding participants for educational trainings in Switzerland was challenging.
- 4 educational trainings were offered between May 2018 until Jan. 2019.
- A total of 37 people attended the one day educational training.
- 15 - 22 questions were to be answered with scores from 1-10, where 10 was the most accurate.
- 85% of the participants have answered the questionnaire.

	4 out of 22 questions
1	I know someone with a Soul Injury
2	I think, I may have a Soul Injury
3	I have received helpful tools for my professional life and private life
4	I had the opportunity to learn and practice the three skills listed in the Swiss manual "Spiritual Care in Palliative Care"

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Additional data. 33 participants.

- I used my recent visit at the *Soul Injury* institute in the USA to obtain more data (February 2019). Two questions were to be answered with YES or NO from the participants attending the institute.
- It is likely, that the higher score is due to the increased length and intensity of the educational training (3 days).

Did this institute offer you an opportunity:

- to practice and learn the three skills listed in the Swiss manual "Spiritual Care in Palliative Care"? Yes: **93.93%**
- to improve your communication skills in crisis interventions? Yes: **96.96%**

The concept *Soul Injury* was founded by Deborah Grassman and 4 other VA Hospice nurses in the USA. These women took care of over 10'000 dying veterans in 30 years of personal hospice practice. Many of their patients had suffered a trauma or were diagnosed with PTSD.

Please take handouts or visit:
www.palliative-counseling.com

Collage Work:

Soul Injuries tend to surface at the end of life, complicating peaceful dying, when regrets often naturally arise. The origins of a *Soul Injury* often stem from a traumatic event. In my collage work, I tried to demonstrate an example of how such an event might become a lifetime burden.