

Wrestling with the Spirit: Moral Injury and Military Social Workers

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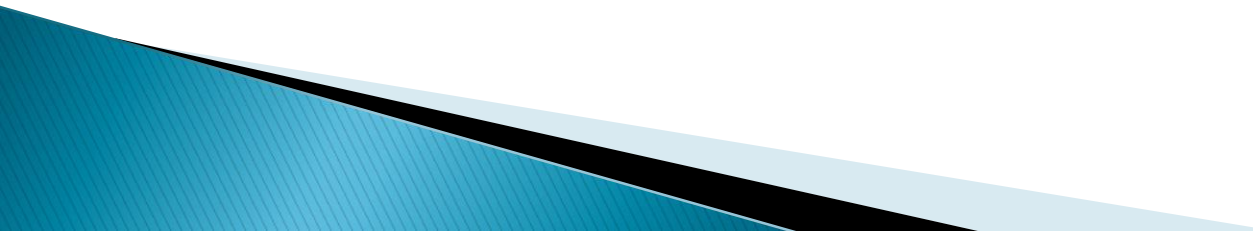


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Workshop Overview

- ▶ Moral Injury: Definition and Prevalence
 - ▶ Moral Injury and PTSD
 - ▶ Moral Injury and Spiritual Wholeness
 - ▶ Research Overview
 - ▶ Recognizing Potential Moral Injurious Experiences
 - ▶ Concluding Thoughts
- 

Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

**“War is horrible.... All the soldiers I know, including me, think it is a bunch of #####. We came in and invaded this country and murdered a lot of innocent people. So tell me how we are heroes.”
(Gilbertson, 2008)**



Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

“A lot of things really make sense when you’re doing them over there. But when you come back, it’s just like, how did I do that? ... Everything is muted, and I’m never really happy. ... I want, more than anybody else to find meaning to my experience over there, and something good to feel about. But I just can’t find it.” (Brock & Lettini, 2012, p. 45)



Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

- **Military combat**
- **Mission comes first**
- **Deep wounds of moral injury**
- **The psychological consequences of abandoning one's core moral beliefs at the behest of authority in high stakes situations (Shay, 2011)**
- **Definition based on research with Vietnam Veterans**

Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

“He was just a kid. But I’m sorry, I’m trying not to get shot and I don’t want any of my brothers getting hurt, so when you are put in that kind of situation... it’s ##### that you have to, like shoot him. You know it’s wrong. But ... you have no choice.” (Wood, Damned if they kill, Damned if they don’t. Huffington Post, 2014)



Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

Behaviors that affect an individual's emotional, psychological, behavioral, spiritual, and social well-being that result from performing significantly regretful acts as well as failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress one's deeply held moral beliefs and expectations (Litz et al., 2009)

Damage done to an individual's moral core as a result of experiencing potentially moral injurious experiences (Yan, 2016)

Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

- **Over 50% reported having PMIE (Hoge et al., 2004)**
- **National study results by Wisco and colleagues (2017)**
- **Potentially moral injurious experiences (Nash et al., 2013)**

Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

- **9 PMIEs**

Observing things that violate moral beliefs

Bothered by viewing others immoral acts

One's behavior violates moral core

Bother one's violation of moral code or values

Violating moral code by failing to do what you should have done.

Bothered by failure to uphold moral beliefs

Moral Injury: Definition & Prevalence

- **9 PMIEs**

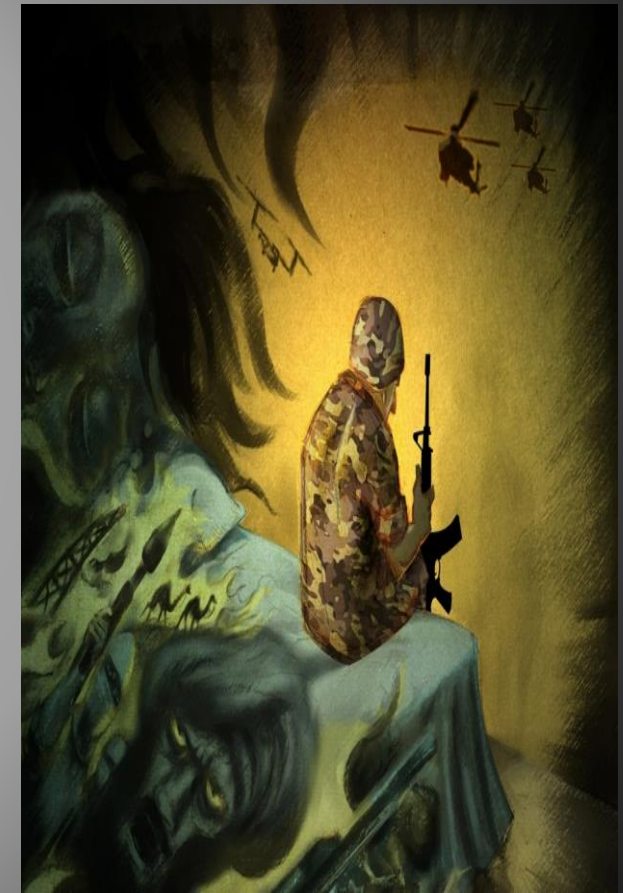
Feeling betrayed by leaders that were trusted

Feeling betrayed by fellow service members

Feeling betrayed by others outside the military

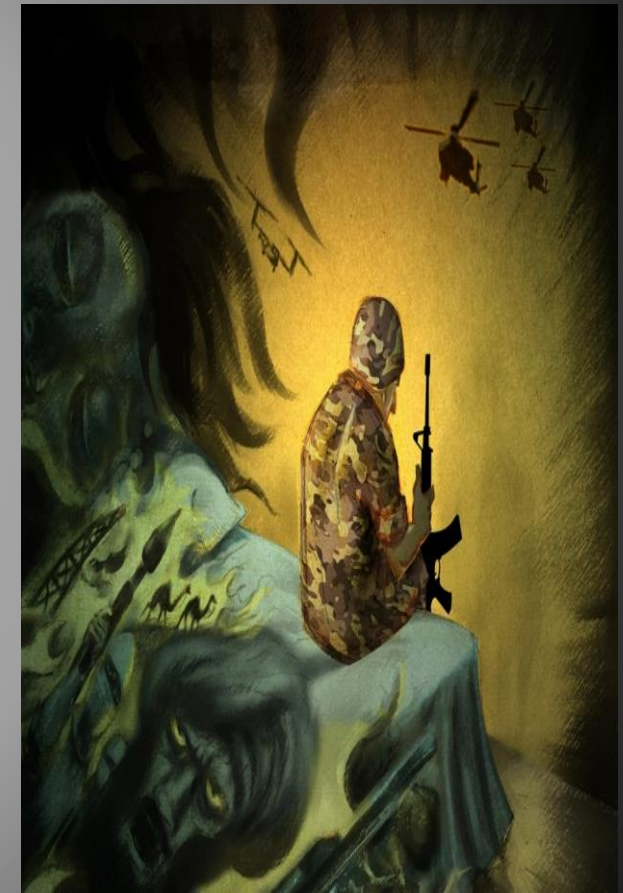
Moral Injury & PTSD

- MI features parallels PTSD (Nash, 2017; Bryan et al., 2018)
- Noticeable bouts of anger, problems sleeping, nightmares, self-medicates, excessive anxiety, fear, and depression.
- Experiencing MI increases likelihood of PTSD (Nasarov et al, 2015; Yan, 2016)



Moral Injury & PTSD

- MI conceptualized as shame and betrayal based conditions; PTSD a fear and/or anxiety based disorder.
- Core indications for MI include self-blame, trust issues, and spiritual/existential issues (Griffin, Purcell, & Burkman, 2019; Hodgson & Carey, 2017)



Moral Injury & PTSD

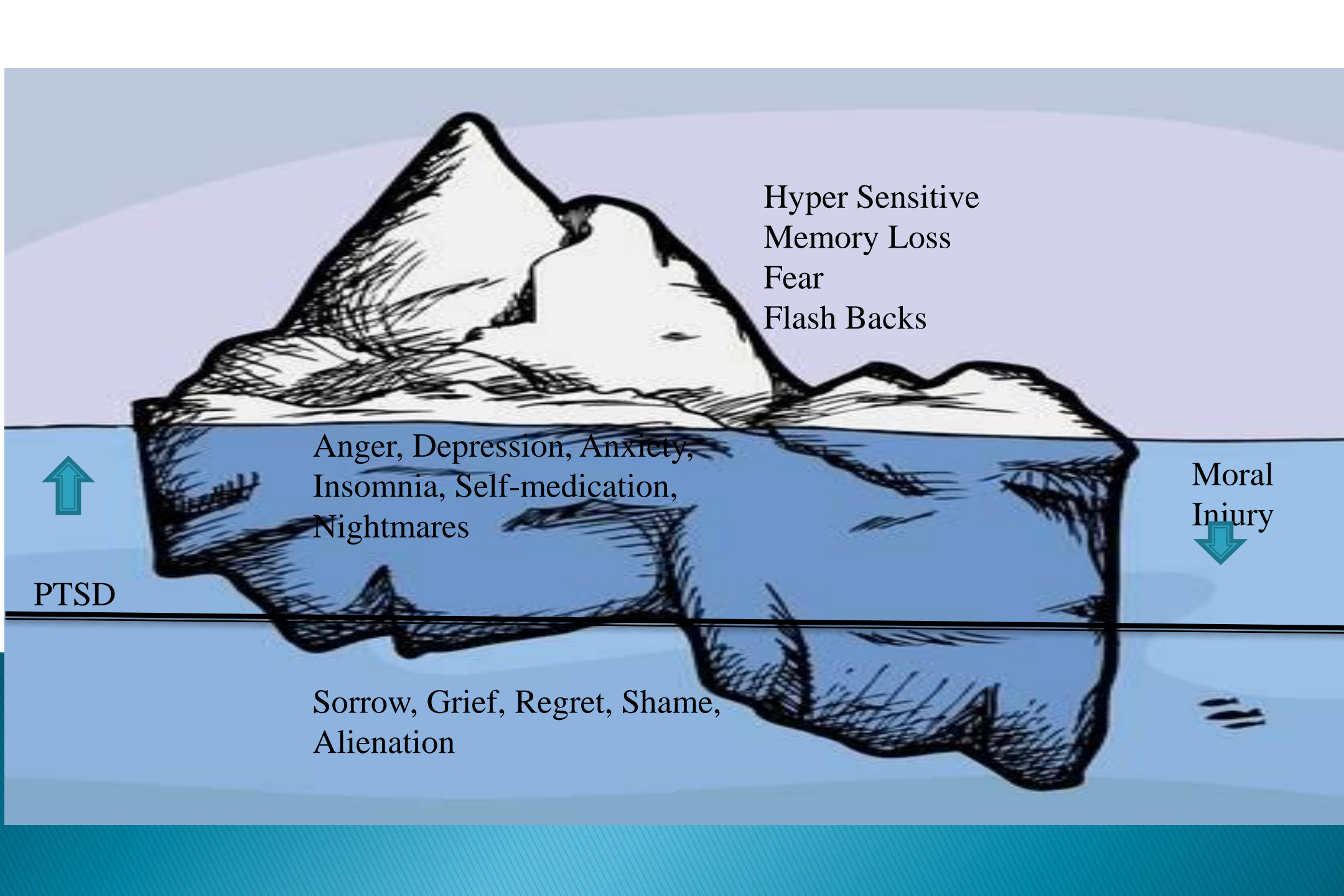
MI Symptoms

- Persistent negative emotions –guilt, shame, remorse, disinterest in pleasure
- Reliving event – sleep problem, painful memories, re-experience demoralizing event
- Avoidance – self –isolation, no crowds, no talking about incident
- Trust issues – withdraw from social situations
- Drug/Alcohol abuse – self-medicate to manage guilt from trauma

Moral Injury & PTSD

PTSD Symptoms

- Re-experiencing traumatic event
- Emotional numbness – social isolation
- Hyperarousal – difficulty sleeping, concentrating, easily irritated
- PTSD may be the tip of the MI iceberg

An iceberg floating in a blue ocean. The tip of the iceberg is above the water line, and the much larger part is submerged below. The water surface is a dark blue line. The sky is a light blue gradient. The ocean floor is a darker blue gradient. The iceberg is drawn with black outlines and cross-hatching for shading.

Hyper Sensitive
Memory Loss
Fear
Flash Backs

Anger, Depression, Anxiety,
Insomnia, Self-medication,
Nightmares

Moral
Injury

Sorrow, Grief, Regret, Shame,
Alienation



PTSD



Moral Injury and Spiritual Wholeness

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” Psalm 139:7-8, NIV



**We are not human beings
having a spiritual experience.
We are spiritual beings
having a human experience.**

Spiritual Journey phases

Phase three:

divine oneness
freedom/ power

self phase

soul phase

ego develop

pre-ego

spiritual ground

Phase two:

true meaning
authenticity

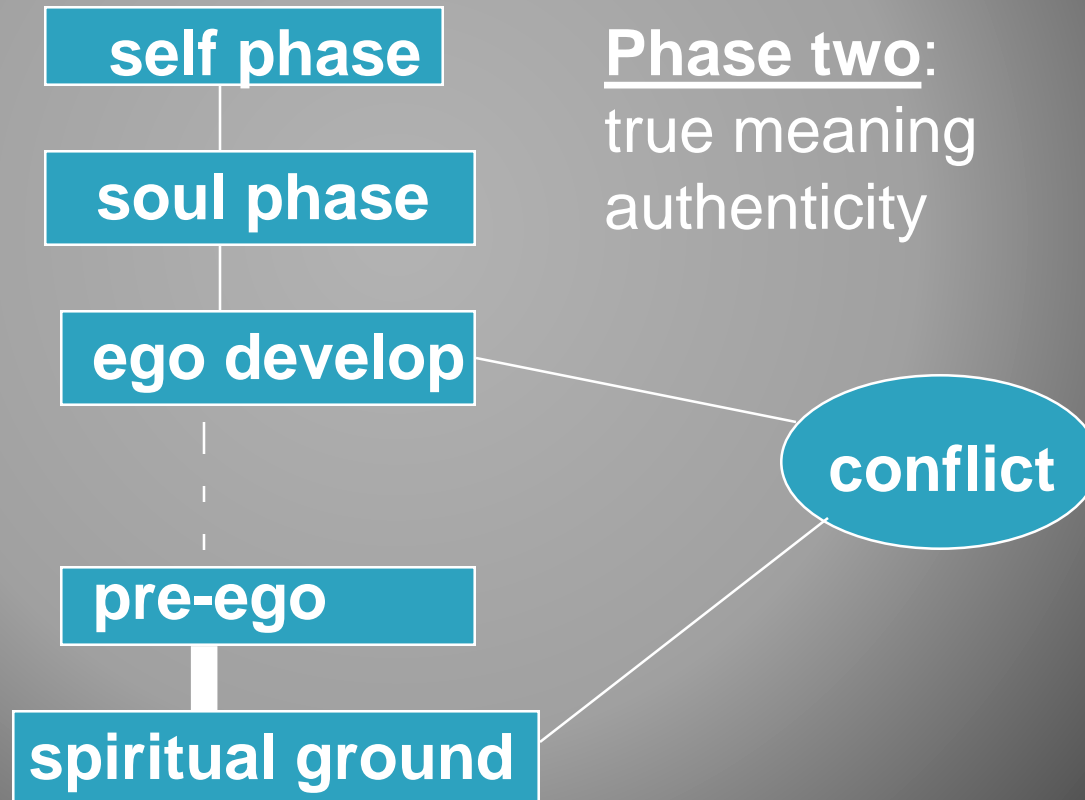
conflict

Phase one:

vulnerable ego
Warrior & Caregiver

embedded
Innocent & Orphan

Birth



Pearson's Archetypes

Ego	Soul	Self
Innocent	Seeker	Ruler
Orphan	Lover	Magician
Warrior	Destroyer	Sage
Caregiver	Creator	Jester

(Pearson & Marr, PMAI Manual, 2003)

Spiritual Forces of Completeness

- ▶ Innocent

- ▶ Orphan

- ▶ Warrior

- ▶ Caregiver

- ▶ “I Believe in you, I trust you won’t let ,me down”

- ▶ “If I don’t take care of me, who will? No one is perfect.”

- ▶ “Work hard and never give up”

- ▶ “I’m here to help a friend in need. Selfless service my calling.”

Spiritual Forces of Completeness

- ▶ Seeker
 - ▶ “I want to experience a meaningful connection.”
- ▶ Lover
 - ▶ “Follow my passion, even if others don’t understand.”
- ▶ Destroyer
 - ▶ “Ready to leave old relationships that can be constricting.”
- ▶ Creator
 - ▶ “Be with those who allow you to be the person you are inside.”

Spiritual Forces of Completeness

- ▶ Ruler
 - ▶ “I’m capable of being weak or strong, depending upon the situation”
- ▶ Magician
 - ▶ “I wouldn’t take nothing for my journey”
- ▶ Sage
 - ▶ “Do that which is wise”
- ▶ Jester
 - ▶ “Live in the moment”

Research Overview

- **Purpose**
- **Design**
- **First Step**
 - **Analyze narrative expressions**
 - **Identify potential moral injurious experiences**
 - **PMIEs occur in 3 areas: (1) Transgression by oneself; (2) Transgressions by others; (3) Acts of betrayal**

Recognizing PMIEs

“I was counseled by the Battalion Commander and advised that if I wanted to be promoted, I would follow his lead.” (Transgression by self, others, or an act of betrayal by others who may have been trusted)



Recognizing PMIEs

**“I felt a duty to our nation;
there were people around me
who privately felt betrayed by
what we as officers were
involved in doing.”
(Transgression by self,
others, or an act of betrayal
by others who may have been
trusted)**



Recognizing PMIEs

“I believed I violated my conscious by keeping my mouth closed and by sitting back, not standing up and saying something to leadership.” (Transgression by self, others, or an act of betrayal by others who may have been trusted)



Recognizing PMIEs

**“I got into a lot of trouble with my chain of command because I was a very strong advocate in the Theater of Combat Operations.”
(Transgression by self, others, or an act of betrayal by others who may have been trusted)**



Research Overview

- **Purpose**
- **Design**
- **First Step**
- **Second Step**
 - **Identify archetypal energy represented in PMIEs**
 - **Orphan energy prevalent**

QUESTIONS???