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Moral injury in teaching: the systemic roots of ethical conflict and emotional burnout in education

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ABSTRACT

Moral injury, a concept derived from military psychology, has gained increasing relevance in understanding the ethical and emotional challenges faced by teachers in educational settings. This article investigates moral injury in the teaching profession, focusing on its systemic roots, manifestations, and implications. Using qualitative data from 57 Australian educators, this study explores how teachers experience and navigate moral injury in their professional roles. The study identifies betrayal, ethical conflict, and systemic pressures as central constructs of moral injury. Teachers report feeling unsupported by leadership, constrained by conflicting institutional demands, and disempowered by resource shortages and inequitable policies. These challenges are compounded by intersecting constructs such as compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress, further undermining professional efficacy and well-being. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study examines moral injury across micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem levels, revealing how interactions within and across these systems exacerbate ethical and emotional burdens on teachers. The findings underscore the systemic nature of moral injury, emphasising its roots in institutional frameworks, societal attitudes, and chronic resource inequities. To mitigate moral injury, the study advocates for systemic reforms, including trauma-informed practices, equitable resource distribution, and growth-based assessment models. Professional development programmes focusing on ethical decision-making and resilience-building are also recommended to equip teachers to navigate these challenges. By reframing moral injury as a systemic rather than an individual issue, this research highlights the collective responsibility of educational stakeholders in fostering supportive environments that sustain teacher well-being and enhance educational outcomes.

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Introduction

Moral injury, a concept rooted in military psychology, has gained increasing relevance in professions characterised by high emotional labour and ethical complexity. Initially

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conceptualised as the distress caused by violating deeply held moral values in combat settings (Litz et al., 2009; Shay, 2010), moral injury has since been applied to caregiving professions, including healthcare and education, where ethical and systemic dilemmas frequently arise (Boudreau, 2011; Williamson et al., 2018). In the teaching profession, these moral conflicts often stem from systemic constraints, conflicting institutional demands, and limited resources that hinder educators from acting in alignment with their ethical and professional responsibilities.

Teacher burnout and attrition have become pressing concerns globally, driven by excessive workloads, systemic pressures, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Richards et al., 2018). High-stakes accountability measures, inadequate resources, and diminishing professional autonomy have significantly contributed to teacher stress. In Australia, up to 50% of educators leave the profession within the first five years, citing burnout, administrative burdens, and emotional fatigue (Heffernan et al., 2022). These challenges have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified workload demands and exposed systemic inequities in resource allocation (Adkins-Cartee et al., 2023).

While burnout and compassion fatigue have been extensively studied, moral injury provides a distinct yet underexplored lens for understanding teacher attrition. Unlike burnout, which results from chronic stress, moral injury is rooted in ethical dilemmas, systemic failures, and perceived betrayals by institutions (Levinson, 2015; Sugrue, 2020). Teachers often encounter “potentially morally injurious experiences” (PMIEs) (Litz et al., 2009), such as being required to enforce zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, prioritising standardised test scores over student well-being, or feeling powerless in the face of inequitable resource distribution.

In the Australian context, moral injury is particularly relevant given the pressures of high-stakes testing, workforce shortages, and persistent educational inequities. Teachers may be unable to enact what they know to be right due to systemic constraints, resulting in guilt, disillusionment, and professional distress (Levinson, 2015; Sugrue, 2020). These dynamics mirror findings internationally, where moral injury among educators has been linked to burnout, reduced compassion, and attrition (Currier et al., 2015; Litz et al., 2009).

This study examines moral injury within the teaching profession, exploring how systemic pressures and institutional constraints shape teachers’ ethical conflicts and emotional well-being. Applying Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1977), this research investigates moral injury across micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem levels, revealing the broader structural dimensions of the phenomenon. By reframing moral injury as a systemic issue rather than an individual psychological condition, this study underscores the collective responsibility of policymakers, school leaders, and educational stakeholders in mitigating its impact.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: the next section reviews the conceptual and theoretical foundations of moral injury, distinguishing it from related constructs such as burnout and compassion fatigue. The study’s methodological approach is then outlined, followed by an analysis of qualitative data exploring the lived experiences of teachers. The findings discuss systemic, relational, and personal factors contributing to moral injury, leading to a final section that presents implications for teacher well-being, workforce retention, and educational policy.

Literature review

Conceptual foundations of moral injury

Moral injury, first conceptualised in military psychology, describes the profound distress experienced when individuals perpetrate, witness, or are complicit in actions that violate their deeply held moral values (Litz et al., 2009; Shay, 2010). While originally studied in combat settings, the concept has since been applied to civilian professions, particularly those in caregiving and high-stakes decision-making roles, such as healthcare and education (Boudreau, 2011; Čartolovni et al., 2021). The distinguishing feature of moral injury is its systemic dimension – rather than stemming solely from individual psychological distress, it often arises from institutional structures and policies that create ethical dilemmas and moral dissonance (Simola, 2024). This systemic framing makes moral injury a valuable lens through which to examine institutional harm in education and other professions.

In education, teachers frequently encounter “potentially morally injurious experiences” (PMIEs) (Litz et al., 2009), which include enforcing policies they perceive as harmful, failing to provide adequate support due to resource constraints, or witnessing the negative effects of inequitable schooling practices. Levinson (2015) argues that these ethical conflicts create what he terms “moral traps,” wherein teachers find themselves unable to act in alignment with their professional ethics due to systemic constraints. Similarly, Sugrue (2020) highlights how moral injury in education arises from structural injustices, particularly in underfunded schools where teachers are forced to make ethically complex decisions with limited institutional support. These insights form the conceptual foundation for understanding how moral injury manifests in educational contexts and set the stage for exploring its implications in teacher well-being and workforce sustainability.

Moral injury in educational contexts

The application of moral injury to education remains an emerging field, but existing research highlights its relevance in understanding teacher distress and attrition. Colnerud (2015) and Cohen Lissman et al. (2024) have documented how moral injury manifests in schools, particularly in relation to policy contradictions and resource inequities. Rigid disciplinary policies, high-stakes testing regimes, and chronic underfunding often force teachers to act in ways that contradict their professional judgment, leading to frustration, guilt, and professional disillusionment (Chan et al., 2021; Sugrue, 2020). Together, these studies position moral injury as a useful lens for interpreting teacher burnout and disempowerment within structurally unjust systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these ethical conflicts, as teachers navigated conflicting institutional directives, student welfare concerns, and shifting public health mandates (Adkins-Cartee et al., 2023). Cohen Lissman et al. (2024) identified this period as a time of heightened moral injury, with educators forced to uphold institutional policies that conflicted with their ethical obligations to students. This temporal spike in moral injury highlights how rapidly changing systemic demands can compound teachers’ ethical stress.

Systemic inequities also exacerbate moral injury in education. Teachers in high-poverty schools disproportionately experience institutional failures such as insufficient

funding, lack of trauma-informed training, and unrealistic workload expectations (Keefe-Perry, 2018; Sugrue, 2020). These conditions create a persistent ethical strain, forcing educators to either comply with harmful institutional mandates or advocate for students in ways that may contradict school policies. Such chronic exposure to ethical tension further distinguishes moral injury from more episodic forms of professional stress.

Distinguishing moral injury from burnout and compassion fatigue

Although moral injury shares some characteristics with burnout and compassion fatigue, it is a distinct construct with unique implications. Burnout, as defined by Maslach and Leiter (2016), results from prolonged workplace stress and is marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced professional efficacy. However, moral injury stems from ethical dissonance and systemic betrayals, rather than simply stress overload. This distinction is important for understanding the different types of emotional and ethical burdens teachers carry in their professional roles.

Compassion fatigue, on the other hand, refers to the emotional exhaustion resulting from prolonged exposure to others' suffering (Figley, 1995). Teachers working in trauma-affected classrooms are particularly vulnerable to compassion fatigue, as they often provide emotional support to students facing significant adversity (Caringi et al., 2015; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). However, unlike moral injury, which arises from ethical dilemmas, compassion fatigue stems from the cumulative emotional burden of caregiving. Whereas compassion fatigue emphasises the relational weight of caregiving, moral injury foregrounds the ethical cost of constrained decision-making.

The intersection of these constructs has been documented in educational research. Griffin et al. (2019) suggest that moral injury can intensify burnout and compassion fatigue by exacerbating feelings of guilt, shame, and professional disillusionment. Teachers who experience moral injury frequently report diminished compassion satisfaction – the sense of fulfillment derived from helping others – further contributing to professional disengagement and attrition (Sugrue, 2020). Understanding these interrelationships offers a more nuanced view of teacher well-being and helps identify distinct intervention points.

The systemic nature of moral injury in teaching

Recent studies have reframed moral injury as a systemic issue rather than an individual psychological condition (Cohen Lissman et al., 2024; Čartolovni et al., 2021). Teachers frequently report that institutional constraints – such as rigid accountability measures, chronic underfunding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies – prevent them from fulfilling their ethical responsibilities (Currier et al., 2015). This suggests the need for conceptual models that can account for multi-layered systemic influences on teachers' moral experiences. To better understand the systemic dimensions of moral injury, this study applies Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977), which examines how individuals are influenced by multiple, interrelated environmental systems that shape their experiences and interactions.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and moral injury

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977, 1994) provides a multi-layered framework for analysing human development within nested environmental structures, each exerting direct or indirect influences on an individual's experiences. In the context of teaching, this model helps to conceptualise moral injury as a product of systemic interactions rather than an isolated psychological response. The five levels of Bronfenbrenner's framework – the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem – offer a structured approach to understanding how teachers' ethical dilemmas and professional distress emerge from broader institutional, policy, and societal forces. This theoretical lens also provides a foundation for the findings presented later in the paper, where teacher experiences are interpreted through each ecological layer.

The microsystem refers to teachers' immediate environments, including their relationships with students, colleagues, and school leadership. Moral injury often develops in this context when teachers face ethical conflicts between institutional mandates and their professional judgment, such as enforcing zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that they believe harm students (Sugrue, 2020). The mesosystem encompasses interactions between different microsystems, such as school-family dynamics and inter-school collaboration. Teachers often experience moral distress when they encounter conflicting expectations between school policies and parental concerns, particularly in trauma-affected communities where institutional decisions may not align with students' home circumstances (Keefe-Perry, 2018). These micro- and meso-level tensions illustrate how moral injury is shaped not only by individual actions but also by relational and institutional dynamics.

At the exosystem level, broader institutional and administrative structures come into play, shaping teachers' work environments without their direct involvement. This includes government policies, curriculum mandates, and funding decisions that impose systemic constraints on educators (Griffin et al., 2019). Moral injury is exacerbated when teachers are forced to prioritise standardised test performance over holistic student well-being, reinforcing a sense of professional disempowerment (Cohen Lissman et al., 2024). The macrosystem encompasses the cultural and societal values that influence educational policy and public perceptions of teaching. Persistent narratives that frame teaching as an altruistic vocation, rather than a profession deserving of systemic support, contribute to institutional neglect and reinforce the conditions that lead to moral injury (Levinson, 2015). Macrosystem-level discourses can both shape and obscure the systemic injustices teachers face, deepening the moral strain.

Finally, the chronosystem considers the dimension of time, acknowledging how historical and ongoing systemic changes impact teachers' experiences. Shifts in educational policy, political climates, and significant disruptions – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – can amplify moral injury by introducing new ethical dilemmas while compounding pre-existing systemic issues (Adkins-Cartee et al., 2023).

By framing moral injury within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, this study underscores that teacher distress is not merely an individual phenomenon but a structural issue embedded in multi-level environmental interactions. This perspective highlights the necessity of systemic interventions – such as policy reforms, trauma-

informed practices, and institutional support systems – to address the root causes of moral injury, rather than placing the burden on individual teachers to develop coping mechanisms.

Methods

Participants

The participants for this study were drawn from a larger group of Australian teachers who took part in an initial nationwide study investigating compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress (STS) among educational staff. Recruitment for the initial study was conducted via professional teaching networks, social media platforms, and education sector newsletters, targeting teachers across various school settings and geographic locations. Participants were invited to complete an online survey, which was distributed through these channels and designed to assess their experiences of occupational stress, emotional well-being, and professional resilience.

In the initial study, 2166 teachers voluntarily completed the quantitative survey after providing informed consent. At the end of the survey, participants were given the option to express interest in further qualitative studies, with follow-up invitations extended to those who indicated willingness to participate. From this larger cohort, 57 teachers completed the detailed follow-up survey. Of these, 45 respondents provided a code name, allowing their qualitative responses to be linked to their demographic and quantitative data from the initial study.

Although the broader study was initially focused on compassion fatigue and related constructs, moral injury emerged as a prominent theme during early stages of qualitative analysis. As patterns of ethical conflict, perceived institutional betrayal, and professional disillusionment became evident, the analytical lens was refined to explore moral injury more directly. This theoretical shift reflects the flexible, reflexive nature of qualitative inquiry and was grounded in participants' own descriptions of morally injurious experiences.

This demographic information is presented in [Table 1](#).

Data collection

Fifty-seven participants provided written responses in an open-ended survey. Participants were asked to reflect on their professional experiences, challenges, and the strategies they employed to manage compassion fatigue and systemic stressors. Although the questions were initially framed around compassion fatigue and burnout, the responses provided rich narratives about teachers' lived experiences. These narratives included descriptions of systemic and institutional pressures, unmet needs, and ethical dilemmas, which later aligned with the constructs of moral injury – betrayal, conflict, and systemic pressures.

The survey questions included:

- "How would you describe your current experience of compassion fatigue?"
- "When you are at work, what do you think contributes to your feelings of compassion fatigue?"

Table 1. Demographic data of participants ($n = 57$).

Category	Count (Percentage)
Geographic Location*	
Queensland	34 (59.6)
Victoria	5 (8.8)
New South Wales	3 (5.3)
Western Australia	3 (5.3)
Tasmania	2 (3.5)
South Australia	1 (1.8)
Unknown	9 (15.8)
Sector	
Primary	24 (42.1)
Secondary	22 (38.6)
Unknown	11 (19.3)
Gender	
Female	42 (73.7)
Male	4 (7.0)
Non-Binary/Third Gender	1 (1.8)
Unknown	10 (17.5)
Teaching Experience	
1–5 years	8 (14.0)
5–10 years	14 (24.6)
10–15 years	7 (12.3)
15–20 years	5 (8.8)
20–25 years	4 (7.0)
25–30 years	5 (8.8)
30+ years	5 (8.8)
Unknown	9 (15.8)
Role in School	
Classroom Teacher	48 (84.2)
Middle Leader (e.g. HOD, Year Level Coordinator)	6 (10.5)
Senior Leader (e.g. Principal, Deputy Principal)	2 (3.5)
Unknown	1 (1.8)

* – Geographic location is categorised by Australian state.

- “If you have experienced or are currently experiencing compassion fatigue, how do you think this impacts your practice at work?”
- “What impact, if any, does your experience of compassion fatigue have on your intention or desire to stay in the profession?”

These open-ended questions elicited detailed reflections, which were subsequently re-analysed to explore themes consistent with moral injury constructs.

Focus group discussions were conducted via Zoom with 13 participants who expressed interest in further engagement, leveraging digital technology to connect educators across geographic locations. To ensure effective discussion and participant engagement, these 13 teachers were asked to divide themselves into three separate focus groups, each consisting of four to five participants. This structure facilitated a more interactive environment, allowing participants to share their insights and experiences in a manageable and supportive setting.

Each focus group session lasted between 60–90 min and was moderated by a lead researcher with expertise in qualitative research and teacher well-being. The lead researcher facilitated discussions using a semi-structured interview protocol, which focused on validating and refining themes identified in the previous stage of analysis. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences with compassion fatigue, systemic stressors, and ethical dilemmas in teaching. The discussions were structured to

explore key themes from the earlier study phases, particularly those related to work environments, administrative support, and systemic barriers.

To enhance participant engagement and interaction, Padlet was incorporated as a digital tool, allowing teachers to contribute written responses, rank key issues, and reflect on emerging themes in real-time. Each focus group began with participants ranking themes from least to most impactful, followed by a facilitated discussion in which they expanded on their experiences and proposed strategies to mitigate compassion fatigue. This method ensured that both verbal and written contributions were captured, providing a comprehensive dataset for analysis.

All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and transcripts were generated for thematic analysis. The grouping of participants was based on scheduling availability rather than specific demographic or professional characteristics, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives within each session.

The key topics explored included:

- The influence of systemic pressures, such as resource scarcity and administrative mandates, on teacher well-being.
- Experiences of ethical dilemmas or role conflicts in meeting the needs of trauma-affected students while adhering to institutional policies.
- Strategies for mitigating emotional and professional strain, emphasising systemic and individual supports.

Data analysis

Deductive thematic analysis

The qualitative data from the written survey responses and focus group discussions were analysed together using a deductive thematic analysis approach, focused on the constructs of moral injury: betrayal, conflict, and systemic pressures. Sub-themes were developed within these constructs to provide greater depth and clarity.

Initially, the study aimed to explore compassion fatigue among teachers, but during the first survey analysis, patterns began to emerge that indicated the relevance of moral injury. While examining aspects of compassion fatigue, it became evident that teachers were experiencing ethical distress, systemic barriers, and institutional betrayals that aligned with the constructs of moral injury. As these themes surfaced, further engagement with the moral injury literature revealed its applicability to the data. This recognition led to a second stage of analysis, in which the constructs of moral injury – betrayal, conflict, and systemic pressures – were explicitly applied as an analytical framework. This shift allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which teachers' professional distress extended beyond burnout and compassion fatigue to include deeper ethical and systemic conflicts.

This analytical approach provided insight into the ways in which moral injury manifests in educational contexts, particularly in relation to systemic constraints, conflicting institutional mandates, and teachers' perceptions of professional betrayal. By structuring the analysis around these constructs, the study was able to distinguish moral injury from related constructs like burnout and compassion fatigue, highlighting its unique impact on teacher well-being and retention.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

- (1) Familiarisation: Survey responses and focus group transcripts were reviewed multiple times, with detailed notes capturing participants' experiences. Audio recordings from the focus groups were revisited to ensure that tone and emphasis were reflected in the analysis.
- (2) Coding Against Constructs: Data were coded deductively, guided by the constructs of moral injury:
 - Betrayal: Instances where participants felt unsupported or abandoned by institutional systems or leadership.
 - Conflict: Ethical dilemmas or situations where teachers' professional responsibilities clashed with their personal or moral values.
 - Systemic Pressures: Persistent structural challenges, such as resource shortages, policy constraints, and administrative demands.
- (3) Theme Identification and Sub-Themes: Codes were grouped into broader themes and sub-themes to reflect the varied ways the constructs of moral injury manifested:
 - Betrayal:
 - Leadership Failures: Participants described feeling unsupported by school leadership, such as being left to handle trauma-affected students without guidance.
 - Broken Promises: Examples included promises of professional development or resourcing that were not fulfilled.
 - Systemic Neglect: Participants expressed frustration with broader institutional failings, such as chronic underfunding and inequitable resource distribution.
 - Conflict:
 - Policy Contradictions: Teachers highlighted situations where institutional policies conflicted with their professional judgment, such as enforcing rigid disciplinary measures that they perceived as harmful.
 - Role Tensions: Participants discussed the struggle to balance institutional demands with student welfare, often leading to feelings of guilt and frustration.
 - Systemic Pressures:
 - Resource Shortages: Narratives emphasised the emotional toll of working in under-resourced environments, such as large class sizes and insufficient support staff.
 - Administrative Overload: Participants noted that excessive paperwork and bureaucratic demands detracted from their ability to focus on teaching and supporting students.
 - Accountability Measures: High-stakes testing and performance metrics were identified as significant sources of stress, amplifying feelings of professional inadequacy.
- (4) Reviewing Themes: Themes and sub-themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately captured participants' experiences while maintaining alignment with the constructs of moral injury. Contradictions and ambiguities were examined as opportunities to refine the analysis, revealing unique ways in which moral injury manifests in teaching. Unlike its conceptualisation in military contexts, where moral injury often stems from

singular acts of commission, teachers described cumulative ethical dilemmas arising from systemic constraints, policy contradictions, and leadership failures.

In cases where responses appeared contradictory, such as participants describing both support and abandonment by leadership, these inconsistencies were interpreted as indicative of fluctuating institutional support rather than dismissed as anomalies. The analysis also identified themes beyond betrayal, conflict, and systemic pressures, such as prolonged institutional neglect and the tension between professional autonomy and compliance.

- (1) **Defining and Naming Themes:** Themes were finalised and defined to reflect the nuances within each construct of moral injury. For example:
 - Betrayal was defined as participants' perceptions of systemic abandonment and leadership failures that undermined their trust in the profession.
 - Conflict was defined as ethical dilemmas arising from the tension between institutional policies and teachers' moral or professional values.
 - Systemic Pressures was defined as the structural and institutional barriers that constrained teachers' ability to perform their roles effectively.
- (2) **Producing the Report:** A cohesive narrative was developed, integrating illustrative quotes from participants to provide depth and context to the analysis. These narratives highlighted the interplay between betrayal, conflict, and systemic pressures, illustrating how these constructs collectively shape moral injury in teaching. These findings were then further categorised using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory in order to examine the concept of moral injury across different systems of a teacher's environment.

Findings

The study identifies a collective account emerging from participant teachers' experiences, capturing patterns of moral injury as expressed in survey responses and focus group discussions. While not a singular, linear story, these accounts reflect common themes and systemic patterns shaping teachers' professional realities. These themes are later interpreted through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, providing a framework to understand how moral injury manifests across different levels of a teacher's professional environment. For survey participants, demographic details such as sector, and state have been provided where possible. However, due to the deidentification of focus group transcripts, it was not possible to attribute demographic details to focus group participants, though their responses have been clearly identified as originating from these discussions.

Betrayal

Betrayal emerged as a pervasive theme in the qualitative data, reflecting teachers' profound disillusionment with leadership, unmet promises, and systemic neglect. This theme is situated within the microsystem, where direct relationships with leadership and school structures play a central role in shaping teachers' emotional and professional

experiences. This theme also captures the emotional toll of feeling unsupported and abandoned by the very systems designed to empower and sustain them. Teachers' narratives reveal a deep sense of mistrust and frustration, stemming from systemic failings and leadership actions – or inactions – that undermine their professional capacity and well-being. However, amidst these challenges, a few examples of effective leadership and systemic practices offer hope and illustrate strategies that can mitigate the impacts of betrayal.

Leadership failures

A recurrent sentiment expressed by participants was the erosion of trust in leadership due to their failure to provide meaningful support. Teachers shared experiences of feeling ignored, dismissed, or sacrificed for institutional priorities. For instance, one participant described a situation where a senior colleague highlighted the extent of this erosion:

The situation happened at our school to the point where one of our long-term teachers, 25 years, got up the next week and gave a very clear presentation about trust and how there is no longer any trust in teachers in this school, not in the industry, in the school. (Focus Group 3)

This quote illustrates the systemic nature of leadership breakdowns, where even seasoned educators felt alienated and devalued.

Another teacher highlighted how leadership decisions exacerbated staff shortages, forcing unqualified personnel into teaching roles:

We've got classes that don't even have teachers that are being taught by teacher aides, which is obviously against the law, but that's because we don't have enough body. People used to come to this school, but the change in leadership this year has created this culture where it's an us and them scenario. (Focus Group 4)

The shift in leadership dynamics, according to this participant, created a divisive and toxic work environment, further straining the already limited resources available.

Several participants emphasised that leadership appeared more concerned with optics than addressing on-the-ground realities. One teacher noted,

The leadership team seems more interested in looking good than actually supporting us when it matters most. (Focus Group 1)

Others expressed frustration with being unheard, as captured by the sentiment,

We keep flagging the same issues every year, and the silence from leadership is deafening. (Focus Group 2)

These experiences contributed to a pervasive sense of betrayal, leaving educators feeling isolated in their efforts to navigate systemic challenges.

Broken promises

Unfulfilled promises emerged as a significant sub-theme within betrayal. Teachers expressed frustration with leadership's tendency to announce initiatives or commitments that never materialised. This pattern of broken promises deepened the mistrust between staff and administrators.

One participant shared their experience with a repeatedly delayed initiative

The training promised during our last professional development day didn't happen. They keep saying it will, but we've stopped believing them. (Survey, Primary teacher, NSW)

This lack of follow-through not only left teachers without the skills or resources they needed but also eroded their faith in future commitments.

Another teacher recounted the unmet promise of additional classroom support

They said we'd have a new classroom aide, but here we are, months later, still waiting. You can't run a proper classroom under these conditions. (Focus Group 1)

Such failures to deliver on basic support reinforced a perception that leadership prioritised external appearances over internal functionality.

Some participants described how systemic neglect extended to their professional development. One teacher lamented,

Leadership talks about support for trauma-informed practices, but nothing changes in our classrooms. It's all talk. (Focus Group 2)

Another echoed this sentiment, noting,

Promises made at the beginning of the year are forgotten as soon as the challenges arise. (Focus Group 3)

The cumulative impact of these experiences was a growing cynicism among educators, who began to see leadership promises as empty gestures.

Systemic neglect

The broader systemic neglect experienced by teachers was another critical aspect of betrayal. Participants highlighted the chronic lack of trauma-informed training and the systemic issues that perpetuated this oversight. One teacher pointed out,

Where in our training degrees, we have very, very little in terms of trauma-informed training or social and emotional learning. (Survey, Secondary teacher, Vic)

This gap in preparation left teachers ill-equipped to address the needs of their students, compounding their stress and frustration.

The ongoing nature of systemic neglect was a recurring concern. As one participant explained,

It's the same issues, and nothing has changed. That's crazy. That's two generations of children who have come through the schools with teachers who are being treated so badly with such a lack of support that they don't feel like they can do their job right. (Focus Group 2)

This statement captures the cyclical and entrenched nature of systemic failures, which not only affect teachers but also compromise the educational outcomes of successive generations of students.

Teachers working in rural schools felt particularly overlooked, with one stating,

Rural schools are constantly overlooked, leaving us without even the basic resources we need to function. (Survey, Primary teacher, Qld)

Another teacher articulated a growing sense of burnout and futility, saying,

It feels like the system is designed to burn us out and then replace us without addressing the underlying issues. (Focus Group 4)

These reflections underscore the pervasive impact of systemic neglect on both teacher well-being and student outcomes.

Positive examples

Despite the challenges, some participants provided examples of effective leadership and practices that helped mitigate feelings of betrayal. These positive experiences often centred on proactive, supportive actions by administrators that prioritised teacher needs and well-being.

One participant described how leadership addressed planning time, stating,

We recently had a leadership team that really listened. They instituted a new schedule to give teachers more planning time, which helped a lot. (Focus Group 2)

This action demonstrated a clear understanding of the demands placed on teachers and a willingness to make practical changes to alleviate their workload.

Another teacher highlighted the value of professional development when it was genuinely implemented:

Our principal made sure we had professional development days focused on trauma-informed teaching. It showed they cared about making our jobs easier. (Focus Group 3)

Such initiatives not only equipped teachers with necessary skills but also fostered a sense of being valued and supported.

These positive examples illustrate the potential for leadership to rebuild trust and limit moral injury when they prioritise meaningful action over performative measures. By listening to teachers' concerns and addressing systemic barriers, administrators can create environments where educators feel empowered rather than betrayed.

Conflict

This theme corresponds to the mesosystem and exosystem, where interactions between institutional systems – such as schools, departments, and policy directives – create layered ethical tensions for educators. The theme of Conflict encapsulates the ethical dilemmas and role tensions teachers face as they navigate competing institutional demands and personal or professional values. These conflicts often leave teachers grappling with decisions that undermine their sense of purpose and professional integrity, contributing to emotional exhaustion and moral injury. Within this theme, policy contradictions and role tensions emerged as significant sub-themes, reflecting the systemic and relational challenges of teaching. Despite these struggles, participants also highlighted practices that alleviated or mitigated the impact of conflict, providing examples of effective strategies and policies.

Policy contradictions

Policy contradictions were a pervasive source of frustration for participants, as they described being forced to enforce rules and mandates that clashed with their professional judgment or ethical beliefs. Teachers shared examples of how rigid institutional policies

often failed to account for the realities of their students' lives, leaving them feeling complicit in perpetuating harm.

One participant recounted their struggle with disciplinary policies:

The policy says I should suspend a student for attendance issues, but their home life is falling apart. How does that help? It feels like I'm being forced to harm a child instead of helping them. (Focus Group 2)

Another teacher highlighted how curriculum mandates ignored the diverse needs of their students:

We're asked to push students through the curriculum even when we know they haven't grasped the basics. It's like we're set up to fail them, but we're the ones who carry the guilt. (Survey, Secondary teacher, Qld)

High-stakes testing emerged as a particularly contentious issue, with participants describing the tension between focusing on test preparation and addressing students' broader learning and emotional needs. One participant shared:

High-stakes testing makes us prioritise results over meaningful learning, and it feels so wrong. It's not why I became a teacher. (Survey, Secondary teacher, NSW)

These contradictions left teachers feeling trapped between their moral obligations to their students and their responsibilities to the institution, contributing to a sense of powerlessness and professional dissatisfaction.

Role tensions

Role tensions further compounded the conflicts experienced by teachers, as they were often expected to fulfil multiple roles without adequate support or resources. Participants described being stretched thin as they attempted to balance their responsibilities as educators, caregivers, and administrators.

One teacher explained the challenge of managing these competing demands:

We are told to balance being a carer, a social worker, and a teacher, but none of those roles are properly supported. It's impossible to do them all well. (Focus Group 2)

Another participant emphasised the emotional toll of these expectations:

I feel like I'm drowning in trying to meet the demands of the system while actually helping my students. There's no room to breathe. (Focus Group 3)

Teachers also reflected on how these role tensions impacted their sense of professional identity. One participant noted:

Being a teacher is no longer just about teaching. It's about being everything for everyone, and it's unsustainable. (Focus Group 4)

These narratives reveal the cumulative strain of role overload, as teachers are expected to navigate complex student needs while meeting institutional expectations, often without the necessary training or resources.

Positive examples

Despite the significant challenges associated with conflict, some participants shared examples of practices that helped mitigate these struggles. These positive experiences

often centred on supportive policies or leadership actions that allowed teachers to prioritise their values and professional judgment.

One participant highlighted the impact of restorative justice practices:

One thing I've noticed is our school's push for restorative justice practices instead of punitive measures. It's been a game-changer. It lets us address the root causes of issues instead of just punishing kids. (Survey, Primary teacher, NSW)

Another teacher reflected on how flexible curriculum implementation allowed them to adapt to student needs:

A shift to project-based learning allowed us to tailor content to student interests while still meeting curriculum standards. It felt like we were finally given permission to do what's best for our kids. (Focus Group 3)

Teachers also described how collaborative decision-making processes alleviated some of the pressures associated with role tensions. One participant shared:

Our leadership team involved us in creating a new behaviour management framework. Having a say in the process made all the difference – it felt like our voices mattered. (Focus Group 4)

These examples illustrate how targeted interventions and supportive policies can reduce the conflicts teachers face, allowing them to focus on meaningful teaching and student support.

Systemic pressures

This theme reflects dynamics within the exosystem and macrosystem, where structural conditions – such as education policy, funding allocation, and societal narratives about teaching – shape the institutional demands placed on educators. The theme of Systemic Pressures highlights the structural challenges and institutional demands that exacerbate teachers' stress and compromise their ability to fulfil their roles effectively. Teachers described the strain caused by resource shortages, administrative overload, and accountability measures, all of which limited their capacity to support students and maintain professional satisfaction. These pressures often created environments where teachers felt undervalued, overburdened, and demoralised. However, participants also shared examples of policies and practices that alleviated these pressures, offering insights into strategies for reducing systemic barriers.

Resource shortages

Resource shortages emerged as a significant sub-theme, with teachers describing how the lack of essential materials, funding, and staffing impacted their ability to meet students' needs. The absence of adequate resources was particularly acute in schools serving high-needs populations, where teachers often felt unsupported in addressing complex student challenges.

One participant shared their frustration:

We're operating with outdated textbooks and a severe lack of aides. The system expects us to deliver miracles without the tools to do it. (Focus Group 3)

Another teacher described the impact of large class sizes on their ability to provide individualised support:

Larger class sizes and fewer staff mean that the kids who need the most attention are getting the least. It's heartbreaking. (Focus Group 4)

In rural schools, resource shortages were compounded by geographic isolation. One teacher noted:

Rural schools are constantly overlooked, leaving us without even the basic resources we need to function. (Survey, Primary teacher, WA)

These narratives illustrate the pervasive nature of resource shortages and their direct impact on teachers' ability to fulfil their professional responsibilities, leading to feelings of frustration and helplessness.

Administrative overload

Administrative overload was another prevalent sub-theme, with teachers describing how excessive paperwork and bureaucratic demands consumed valuable time and energy, detracting from their ability to focus on teaching. Many participants expressed frustration with the relentless nature of compliance tasks, which often felt disconnected from their core mission as educators.

One participant lamented:

The endless forms, reports, and compliance tasks take up so much time that I barely have room to plan my lessons. (Focus Group 3)

Another teacher highlighted how administrative demands created a sense of futility:

Every day, there's a new compliance form to fill out, and none of it feels like it benefits the students. (Focus Group 4)

These narratives underscore how administrative overload not only burdens teachers but also diminishes their sense of purpose and professional fulfilment. The focus on bureaucratic compliance often leaves teachers feeling devalued and disconnected from the meaningful aspects of their work.

Accountability measures

High-stakes accountability measures, such as standardised testing and performance metrics, were frequently cited as a source of systemic pressure. Teachers described how these measures prioritised quantifiable outcomes over meaningful learning, creating a culture of stress and competition that eroded their professional autonomy and satisfaction.

One participant shared their frustration with the narrow focus of accountability measures:

We're judged entirely on test scores, as if that's the only thing that matters. It's dehumanising. (Focus Group 2)

Another teacher explained how this emphasis on outcomes impacted their teaching approach:

Teaching to the test means leaving so many kids behind. It's not what education should be. (Focus Group 3)

These quotes highlight the emotional toll of working in systems that prioritise measurable results over holistic education, leaving teachers feeling constrained and disempowered.

Positive examples

Despite the challenges posed by systemic pressures, participants also shared examples of initiatives and practices that alleviated these burdens. These positive experiences often centred on collaborative efforts, resource-sharing strategies, and leadership actions that prioritised teacher well-being.

One participant described the impact of a classroom resources fund:

Our school introduced a classroom resources fund that teachers can use as needed. It has made a world of difference. (Focus Group 1)

Another teacher highlighted a resource-sharing programme:

We started a resource-sharing programme between schools, and it's helped fill some gaps in our supplies. It's not perfect, but it's something. (Survey, Primary teacher, NSW)

In addressing administrative overload, participants emphasised the importance of streamlining processes to reduce unnecessary tasks. One participant shared:

Our leadership team revised our reporting requirements, cutting out the redundant forms. It's given us more time to focus on our students. (Focus Group 3)

Collaborative approaches to accountability measures also offered relief. One teacher reflected:

We shifted to a growth-based assessment model, which focuses on student progress instead of rigid benchmarks. It's been such a relief to work in a system that values learning over numbers. (Focus Group 4)

These examples demonstrate how targeted initiatives and systemic reforms can reduce the pressures teachers face, creating environments where they feel supported and empowered.

Differences in teacher experiences and the role of school context

While the themes of betrayal, conflict, and systemic pressures were consistently reported across participants, notable differences emerged based on teachers' experience levels, school sectors, and geographic locations. These differences can be understood through the ecological systems framework, which highlights how individual teachers are differently positioned within and impacted by their professional microsystems, institutional mesosystems, and broader policy contexts.

Variations based on teaching experience

Early career teachers (ECTs) frequently described shock and disillusionment upon entering the profession, particularly when facing systemic constraints that prevented them from meeting their ethical responsibilities to students. Many reported a lack of preparation

for the emotional and ethical challenges of teaching, which contributed to feelings of powerlessness. One ECT shared:

I knew teaching would be hard, but I didn't realise how many times I'd be put in situations where I had to make choices that felt completely wrong. It's exhausting and makes me wonder if I can do this long-term. (Survey, Primary Teacher, VIC)

By contrast, experienced teachers (10+ years) were more likely to describe moral injury as a cumulative process, often citing years of unaddressed systemic failures, leadership inaction, and the erosion of professional autonomy as contributing factors. These teachers frequently described a declining sense of agency, with some indicating that they had reached a point where they no longer believed in the possibility of meaningful change.

At some point, you stop fighting. You realise that no matter how many times you raise concerns, nothing changes. It's like the system is designed to wear you down until you just comply. (Focus Group 3)

Primary vs. secondary teachers

There were also notable differences between primary and secondary teachers in how they experienced moral injury. Primary teachers were more likely to express distress about role overload, as they were often required to take on additional responsibilities beyond teaching, including social work, counselling, and family liaison roles. Many described being expected to address students' trauma and well-being without adequate resources or training. These differences reflect how microsystem-level demands vary by school stage, shaping distinct moral stressors in daily practice.

We're not just teachers anymore. We're expected to be counsellors, caseworkers, and sometimes even parental figures. But we're not given the time or support to actually do any of those roles properly. (Survey, Primary Teacher, QLD)

In contrast, secondary teachers frequently described moral distress related to curriculum constraints and high-stakes assessment pressures. Many reported feeling forced to prioritise exam performance over student learning and well-being, leading to ethical dilemmas when students were struggling but needed to "pass" regardless.

We spend so much time drilling students for exams that real learning takes a back seat. We know it's wrong, but if we don't do it, we're the ones who get penalised. (Survey, Secondary Teacher, NSW)

The role of school context in moral injury

The school environment played a critical role in shaping teachers' experiences of moral injury. Teachers in rural and underfunded schools reported greater systemic pressures, often describing chronic staff shortages, lack of access to support services, and outdated teaching materials. These conditions heightened feelings of professional inadequacy, as teachers felt they were being set up to fail. These findings point to macrosystemic disparities – such as funding allocation and policy priorities – that structure school-level inequities and teacher vulnerability.

We have students who desperately need mental health support, but we don't even have a school counsellor. It's heartbreaking because we're the ones left trying to hold everything together with no training or resources. (Focus Group 2)

Teachers in low-SES (socioeconomic status) schools similarly described high levels of moral injury, particularly when working with vulnerable students who faced systemic barriers to success that teachers could not change. Many expressed frustration at being expected to “fix” deeply entrenched social issues without institutional backing.

The expectation is that we'll just absorb the trauma, the behavioural issues, the lack of support. But we're not given anything to actually deal with these problems. We're just left to manage the best we can. (Focus Group 1)

Conversely, teachers in better-funded schools reported lower levels of moral injury, particularly when leadership was proactive in reducing bureaucratic workload, prioritising teacher well-being, and providing adequate professional development opportunities. This highlights the critical role of systemic resourcing and leadership practices in mitigating moral injury.

Discussion

Interpreting findings through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977) provides a useful framework for understanding how the interplay of different environmental systems influences moral injury among teachers. The findings demonstrate that moral injury arises from interactions across the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, highlighting the systemic nature of this issue. This study contributes new insights by demonstrating that moral injury is not limited to teachers working in high-trauma schools but is increasingly affecting educators in diverse contexts, including those in well-resourced institutions where rigid policies and performative accountability structures create ethical dilemmas. While this study is situated within the Australian educational landscape, the findings resonate with emerging international research on moral injury in teaching (e.g. Currier et al., 2015; Sugrue, 2020). Common stressors such as standardised testing, resource inequities, and systemic injustice are present across many educational systems, suggesting that the themes identified here may hold relevance beyond Australia. However, local policy, cultural expectations, and professional norms shape the particular ways moral injury is experienced. Further comparative studies are needed to explore how these dynamics play out across diverse global contexts.

Microsystem: teacher-student and peer relationships

At the microsystem level, moral injury is rooted in the immediate interactions teachers have with students and colleagues. Teachers reported ethical dilemmas in their relationships with students, often caused by institutional policies that conflict with their professional values. For example, zero-tolerance disciplinary policies force teachers to act in ways they perceive as harmful to students, disrupting the trust foundational to the teacher-student relationship. Sugrue (2020) emphasises the importance of these relationships in shaping teachers' sense of purpose, with disruptions contributing

significantly to moral injury. Peer relationships within schools also influence teachers' experiences. Supportive colleagues can buffer the emotional toll of systemic pressures, while strained or competitive dynamics exacerbate feelings of isolation and stress. This finding aligns with Čartolovni et al. (2021), who argue that relational supports within immediate environments are critical for mitigating moral injury in helping professions. However, many teachers described how witnessing colleagues experience the same ethical distress reinforced their sense of systemic betrayal. In well-resourced schools, this often emerged in the form of silent compliance, where teachers recognised policy harms but felt powerless to act. This suggests that moral injury can persist even in supportive school cultures when systemic constraints limit teachers' professional autonomy.

Mesosystem: school-community interactions

The mesosystem, which encompasses the interactions between different microsystems, such as schools, families, and community organisations, often exacerbates moral injury. Teachers highlighted tensions arising from conflicting expectations between schools and parents, particularly in trauma-affected communities. For example, while schools focus on enforcing attendance policies, families may prioritise managing external crises, leaving teachers in ethically complex positions. These conflicting demands create persistent ethical dilemmas, reinforcing the feeling that teachers are caught between competing interests.

Levinson (2015) describes these "moral traps" as situations where educators are unable to reconcile competing demands, leading to professional disillusionment. Additionally, teachers reported frustration with the lack of collaboration between schools and external agencies, such as mental health or social services. This disconnect places an undue burden on teachers to fulfil roles beyond their expertise, amplifying feelings of inadequacy and ethical conflict.

Exosystem: institutional policies and administrative practices

The exosystem includes policies and administrative decisions that indirectly affect teachers. Systemic inequities, such as chronic underfunding, rigid testing regimes, and punitive disciplinary frameworks, emerged as significant contributors to moral injury. Participants described how institutional policies often created ethical dilemmas by prioritising metrics over meaningful education. This study contributes a nuanced perspective on how moral injury emerges across different school contexts – not just in under-resourced environments but also in high-performing institutions where inflexible policies undermine professional judgment.

This finding is consistent with Griffin et al. (2019), who argue that organisational constraints, rather than individual failings, are primary drivers of moral injury in helping professions. High-stakes accountability measures, such as standardised testing, were particularly contentious. Teachers reported feeling compelled to focus on test results at the expense of fostering holistic learning environments, a tension also highlighted by Cohen Lissman et al. (2024). Addressing these systemic issues requires institutional reforms that align policies with educators' professional values and the realities of their classrooms.

Macrosystem: societal expectations and cultural values

The macrosystem reflects the broader societal and cultural norms that shape education. Societal undervaluation of teaching, combined with unrealistic expectations of educators, exacerbates moral injury. Teachers working in high-poverty schools described how systemic neglect and societal inequities forced them into untenable ethical positions, consistent with Sugrue's (2020) findings on the intersection of structural inequities and moral injury. Cultural narratives that frame teaching as a vocational or sacrificial profession further compound these pressures. These narratives often justify the lack of systemic support for teachers, placing the onus on individuals to overcome systemic barriers. Levinson (2015) critiques this cultural framing, arguing that it obscures the structural origins of moral injury and perpetuates cycles of professional disillusionment.

This study illustrates how shifting cultural narratives about education have exacerbated moral injury in ways not previously explored. While moral injury has often been linked to burnout and secondary traumatic stress, this study highlights its distinctiveness in the education sector, showing that it is driven by a clash between deeply held professional values and broader systemic constraints.

Additionally, this study reveals that moral injury is increasingly present in schools that have historically been considered "privileged" spaces. Teachers in high-performing schools described a unique form of moral injury related to institutional pressures to maintain rankings, reputations, and standardised test scores at the expense of holistic student development. This suggests that moral injury is not merely an outcome of teaching in underfunded or disadvantaged schools but is becoming more pervasive across all educational settings.

Chronosystem: temporal and historical contexts

The chronosystem, encompassing the temporal dimensions of change and continuity, adds another layer to understanding moral injury. Teachers highlighted how prolonged exposure to systemic pressures, such as resource shortages and shifting educational mandates, compounded their stress and ethical dilemmas over time. The COVID-19 pandemic, as described by Cohen Lissman et al. (2024), further intensified these challenges, forcing educators to navigate new moral conflicts while adapting to unprecedented disruptions. These temporal factors underscore the cumulative nature of moral injury and the need for long-term strategies to address its root causes.

Broader implications: moral injury as a systemic issue

The findings challenge the view of moral injury as primarily an individual psychological phenomenon, reframing it as a systemic issue embedded in institutional and societal structures. While earlier research (Litz et al., 2009) conceptualised moral injury as arising from personal responses to ethical dilemmas, more recent studies emphasise the role of systemic and organisational factors (Čartolovni et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2019). This study reinforces the systemic perspective, highlighting how institutional policies, resource inequities, and cultural values contribute to moral injury in education. Recognising moral injury as a systemic issue shifts the focus from individual resilience to structural accountability. Policymakers and administrators must address the systemic barriers that undermine teachers' professional integrity, such as inadequate resources,

rigid accountability measures, and punitive disciplinary policies. This systemic reframing also has implications for teacher training and professional development, emphasising the need for equipping educators to navigate ethical dilemmas within complex systems.

Finally, by applying Bronfenbrenner's framework, this study makes visible the interconnected systems that contribute to moral injury, reinforcing the urgent need for multi-level reforms. Addressing moral injury requires not only school-level changes but also shifts in policy, cultural attitudes, and leadership practices to ensure that teachers are not continuously placed in ethically impossible positions.

To address the systemic contributors to moral injury in education, a multifaceted approach is required. First, policy reforms should prioritise teacher autonomy and ethical agency by reducing overreliance on standardised testing and prescriptive curricula (Levinson, 2015; Sugrue, 2020). Greater flexibility in pedagogical decision-making can help educators act in alignment with their professional values. Second, schools should implement structured opportunities for ethical reflection and collegial support, such as facilitated professional learning communities (PLCs) that focus on moral and emotional dimensions of teaching. Third, teacher preparation programmes must incorporate explicit training in ethical decision-making, systemic analysis, and emotional resilience, equipping pre-service teachers to navigate moral complexity (Cohen Lissman et al., 2024; Griffin et al., 2019). Finally, leadership at all levels should be trained to recognise signs of moral injury and foster workplace cultures where ethical concerns can be safely raised and addressed (Čartolovni et al., 2021). These strategies require coordinated effort but are essential to protecting the moral and psychological wellbeing of the teaching workforce.

Recommendations

The findings point to actionable strategies across policy, practice, and professional development to mitigate moral injury in education.

Systemic reforms are essential to address the root causes of moral injury. These include equitable resource allocation, eliminating high-stakes testing regimes, and adopting flexible disciplinary policies. Sugrue (2020) highlights the importance of reallocating funding to high-need schools, ensuring adequate staffing and resources to reduce ethical dilemmas for teachers. Growth-based assessment models, which focus on student progress rather than rigid benchmarks, can also alleviate systemic pressures while fostering more meaningful learning environments.

Embedding trauma-informed and restorative practices within schools can help reduce the relational and ethical conflicts that contribute to moral injury. Simola (2024) advocates for dignity-infused pedagogy, emphasising the importance of relational and ethical wellbeing in supporting educators. Restorative justice practices, for example, enable teachers to address disciplinary issues collaboratively, reducing the tension between institutional mandates and personal values.

Targeted professional development programmes focused on ethical decision-making and resilience-building are critical for mitigating moral injury. Griffin et al. (2019) stress the importance of equipping educators with practical strategies to navigate systemic constraints and ethical dilemmas effectively. Structured peer mentoring and reflective practice groups can provide spaces for teachers to process moral

conflicts and share strategies for resolution, fostering a sense of community and professional support.

Conclusion

This study situates moral injury within Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, demonstrating how interactions across multiple environmental systems contribute to teachers' ethical and emotional challenges. The findings underscore the need for systemic reforms, trauma-informed practices, and targeted professional development to address the root causes of moral injury. By reframing moral injury as a systemic issue rather than an individual failing, this research highlights the collective responsibility of policymakers, administrators, and educators in creating supportive and equitable environments for teachers and students alike. Addressing these challenges is essential for sustaining the teaching profession and fostering meaningful educational outcomes.

Ethical approval

Ethics for this study was approved by 2022/HE001261.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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