

# Missing & Health

Shattered trust: The silent wounds of moral injury in relatives of missing people

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# Today

1

Research  
overview

2

Moral injury in  
families of missing  
people

3

Using Art to raise  
awareness, find  
meaning, and educate

*Moral injury*



# Trigger warning

This presentation contains sensitive material related to **trauma, moral injury, grief, anxiety, depression, and going missing.**

The content may be distressing.

If you feel uncomfortable or need a break, please feel free to step away.

If at any point you feel overwhelmed, remember that it's okay to take care of yourself.

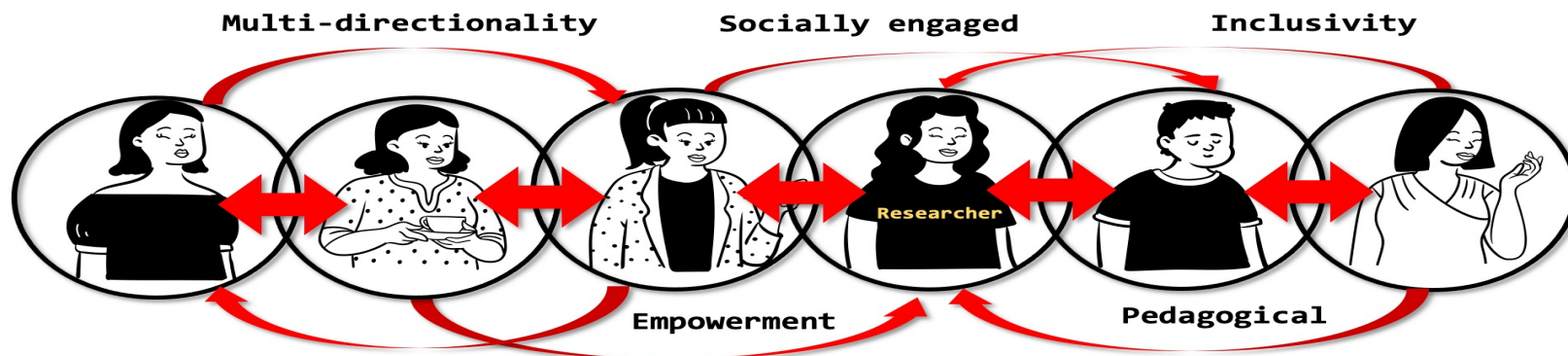
**Your emotional well-being is important.**

## AIM OF RESEARCH

1. To raise awareness and understanding of the support needs and challenges of relatives and friends of missing people and how they change over time.
2. Develop training materials and artefacts for mental health, health care providers to reduce moral injury, hermeneutical injury, foster empathy, and person-centred support.







## ART-BASED METHODOLOGY



### MSc Psychology Findings and representation

5 life story interviews, focus  
group on need with 37  
participants, art exercise  
11 paintings and collages, 1  
animation, 1 film



### Life story Interviews

10 participants



### Art Workshops

Body mapping as  
research method  
5 participants



### Autoethnography

Narratives  
Paintings  
Creative expression  
Scoping review



### Workshops medical, nursing and counselling schools

Body mapping and role  
play

## IMPACT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

**D 1085**

18a

Aéroport de Grenoble-Isère

19

**D 1085**

**D 1075**

**D 520**

**D 1092**

**A 49**

**D 1090**

**A 41**

Meylan

Grenoble

**D 523**

Aline PENON a quitte son domicile a Vourey le 3 mai 2013 pour faire une promenade dans la campagne. Elle a ensuite été vue par un témoin a Morette, un autre témoin l'aurait vue le 5 mai a Vizille.

Aidez nous a la trouver! C'est une bonne marcheuse qui aurait pu être prise en stop. Soyez vigilant et appelez la gendarmerie au 04 76 35 30 17 si vous l'apercevez! Merci

**AVIS DE RECHERCHE**

Aline Lilina PENON

68 ans, 1m60

Malade d'Alzheimer

Partagez, aidez nous à trouver notre mère!

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**APPEL A TEOIN**

**DISPARITION**

Aline Lilina PENON

68 ans, 1m60

Malade d'Alzheimer

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**AVIS DE RECHERCHE**

Aline (Lilina) PENON

**www.trouvonsaline.fr**

**0476353017**



**146,540**

Individuals per year

National Crime Agency, 2023/2024

**2 million**

Number of people impacted  
emotionally or financially by  
missing people



**8 – 12 million**

Individuals per year

(Missing People 2023)

**96-144 million**

Number of people impacted  
emotionally or financially by  
missing people

## Missing incidents

**304,674**

National Crime Agency, 2023/2024



**100,000** adults

Up to 18% of these  
reported missing from  
hospitals



**200,000** children

## Reasons for going missing

Mental Health

Relationship

Drugs or Alcohol

Depression or Anxiety

School

Misunderstanding

Suicide attempt

Dementia

## Risk to life

**4 in 10** feeling suicidal

**3 in 4**

coming to harm while  
missing



People dying while  
missing higher than  
deaths from homicide

## Cost

**£2,400** per search  
(Police cost only)



# Scotland



**16,089 missing incidents** reported to Police Scotland every year in 2023/24 (National Crime Agency, 2023/2024)

**20,000** calls received by Police Scotland in 2023/24

**12.5%** increase in calls received by Police Scotland

**Up to 80%** of missing adults **with diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues**

**60%** missing investigation for children and young people

**Children in care** (National Crime Agency, 2023/2024):

**24.5%** of all missing children

**43%** of missing children incidents

## LEGAL CHALLENGES

## FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

## POLICE, MEDIA, PUBLIC BIASES

## MORAL INJURY

**Psychological:** intrusion, rumination, negative self-concepts around feeling of worthlessness/failure

**Existential**

**Emotional:** guilt, shame, anger, grief, suicidal thoughts, hopelessness

**Social:** alienation, social withdrawal, reduced capacity for trust

**Behavioral:** avoidance, interpersonal difficulties

## ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

## SOCIAL/ RELATIONAL CHALLENGES

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Ambiguous Loss (Boss, 2000, 2007, 2017)

Limbo, missing person both present psychologically and absent physically

Disenfranchised grief

Uncertainty, helplessness

Narrative void impacting the

autobiographic self (Clifford et al., 2020)

Anticipatory mourning

Ruminating and counterfactual thinking

Chronic stress/trauma

Increased likelihood of prolonged grief (PG), depression, and post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH



# hermeneutical injury

Hermeneutical injury is a concept emerging from philosophical and sociological discourse, referring to the harm caused when the process of interpreting and understanding a person's experience or text is done in a way that misrepresents, distorts, or invalidates their perspective. This can occur through biases in interpretation, cultural misunderstandings, or harmful frameworks that misread the intentions and meanings of individuals or groups.

Fricker (2007), Foucault (1980), Mouffe (2000)

**Medical Discourse:** When healthcare professionals misunderstand or fail to recognize the lived experiences of patients, particularly in marginalized or minority groups (e.g., race, gender).

**Trauma and Testimony:** Survivors of violence or war whose testimonies are misunderstood or invalidated, thus reinforcing their sense of alienation and suffering.

# moral injury

Moral injury refers to the psychological, emotional, and social harm experienced by individuals when they are involved in events that violate their deeply held moral beliefs or values.

Litz et al. (2009), Williamson et al. (2018), Shav (2014).

# MORAL INJURY RESPONSE

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

Cognitive, intrusion, rumination, negative impacts on mental health, negative self-concepts around beliefs of worthlessness or failure

## BEHAVIOURAL

Avoidance  
interpersonal difficulties

## EXISTENTIAL

## EMOTIONAL

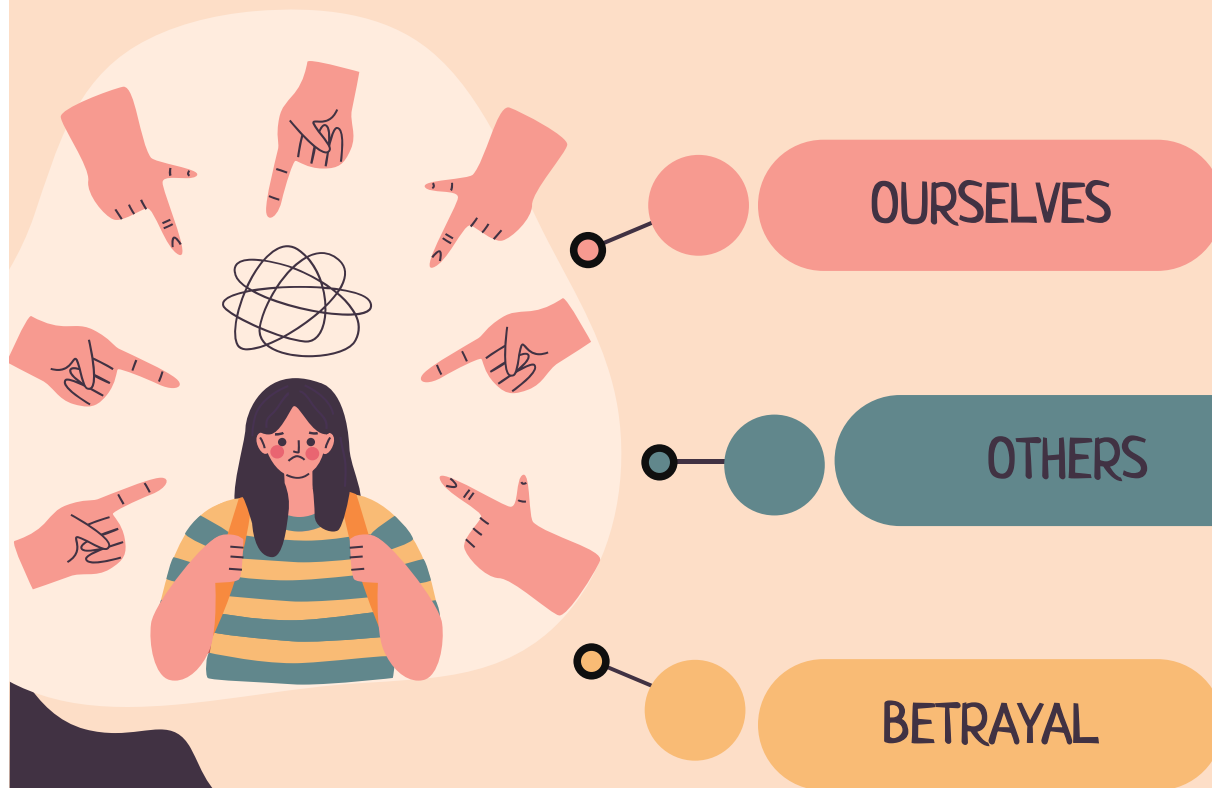
Guilt, shame, anger, grief, suicidal thoughts, hopelessness, emotional dysregulations

## SOCIAL

Alienation, social withdrawal, reduced capacity for trust



# MORAL INJURY



*Example of transgressions of values perceived:*

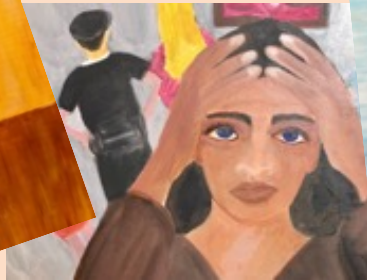
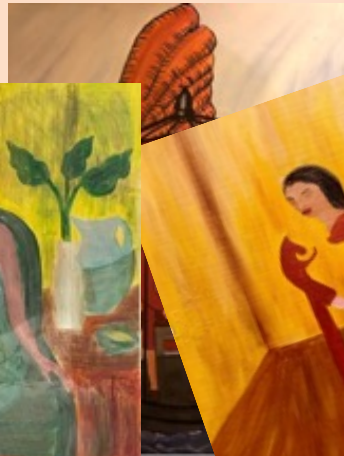
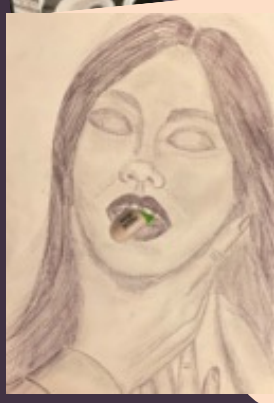
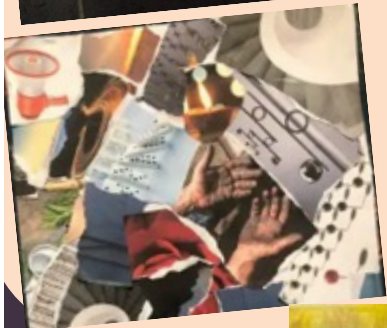
Legitimate unpreparedness  
Not being able to protect/prevent missing/find one's missing family member

*Example of transgressions of values perceived:* Cyberbullying, Lack of witness accounts and media attention  
Lack of understanding from others

*Example of transgressions of values perceived:* Lack of transparency in police resource allocation and processes, Lack of informed support



# *Using art to understand lived experience*





**THROWING PILLS AT US  
IT'LL BE OKAY!**

*"We'd like to drug you up  
so that you are calmer.  
It'll be okay.  
I'm sure he'll be coming back."*

*"But I feel there is something  
SERIOUSLY wrong here ...  
it is not like him!"*


and  
*Nobody's looking...  
Nobody's listening..."*

Mother, whose son went missing after a night out 29 years ago

Be supportive, don't make assumptions about what might have happened and try to reassure the family.

Be curious and open minded.

**Establishing out someone's needs:** Every situation is unique as are needs. Talking about someone's needs might also allow them to recover their sense of **agency** over their own life and surroundings.



**I SHOULD HAVE SAID YES**

*The doctor did say to me;  
"Do you think maybe you need some counselling?"  
and in my head, I was going YES!  
and in my body, I was saying NO!  
"I think it's you know... I'll be okay..."  
Then I thought about it afterwards.  
I thought I shouldn't have turned it away.  
I should have said yes.  
Nobody asked again...*

Mother, son missing since 1996 after a night out

Offering options can be helpful in cases when young people or children lack knowledge of what they need; in such cases, they usually know what they do not need.

Recognise that patients might have lost **trust** in organisations that have failed to support them.

Be an advocate to families.

Support access financial services, social services, accommodation, mental health services etc ...



**MISHEARD**

*"That sensation of I've got nowhere else to go that made me attempt to take my life..."*

*...but doctors do tend to believe what the police tell them over what you are telling them is actually going on.*

*And I think that was part of the problem was I felt I really wasn't believed about the level and pressure the police put on."*

Dad, 14-year-old son missing since 2007


# Why creative health?

- **Contact-based interventions reduce stigma**
- **Fostering Empathy**
- **Enhance Patient-Centered Care**
- **Improve Communication & Reflection**
- **Bridge Theory-Practice Gap**
- **Addressing vicarious trauma and Enhancing Wellbeing**
- **Promoting Cultural Competence and Social Justice**

**The therapeutic relationship is a strong predictor of patient outcome!**

Validate their feelings and emotions as resulting from the trauma of the person going missing.

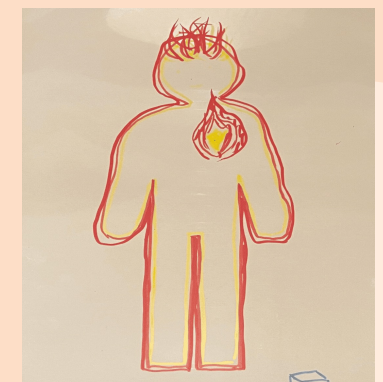
Break the loneliness, be an empathic witness, holding space for the other person's emotions.



**HOLDING SPACE**

*I remember going to see my GP and I sat down he never clinched, he gave absolutely no negative sign whatsoever that time was running out, he just was amazing! I had no idea that he gave me all that time. And that was exactly what was required.*

Daad, missing his son since 2007



**Warning the presentation explores  
traumatic experiences, missing people,  
grief**

**If you are feeling affected, please come at the end of  
the lecture to discuss**

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## The void in us

It is like a permanent part of you is missing... This emptiness is so incredibly painful...

The empty space left behind, we grieve every day, waiting for news that might help us understand what and why this happened.

It's just to know, isn't it?

Nothing more, but yet so much.

It doesn't sound like much, but it's pretty big!

*Acrylic on canvas | Painting from Pascale Waschnig with composite texts from relatives and friends of missing people | Through the Prism of Missing, UWL*

BRING THIS PAINTING TO LIFE  
ON YOUR SMARTPHONE WITH  
HEADPHONES



1. Install the  
Artivive app



2. View the artwork  
through your  
smartphone

OR OR



YouTube





*Acrylic on paper | Painting from Pascale Waschnig with composite texts from relatives and friends of missing people | Through the Prism of Missing, UWL*

## **It is always with you**

If you don't know anything, you just imagine everything...

But there is that possibility... that somebody out there does know...

It's just a terrible way for a human being to have to live with all those horrible thoughts.

It's always with you.

It's always there.

He is always there...

It is a very excruciating existence...

But you can't actually allow yourself to go down that rabbit hole and wallow in it.

You try and put all those emotions in boxes.

You just have to deal with it the best we can day in, day out.

**BRING THIS PAINTING TO LIFE  
ON YOUR SMARTPHONE WITH  
HEADPHONES**



1. **Install** the  
Artivive app



2. **View** the artwork  
through your  
smartphone

**OR ON**



YouTube



QR code linking to the artwork's YouTube video.



Acrylic on paper | Painting from Pausie Waschnig with composite texts from relatives and friends of missing people | Through the Firm of Missing, UMW

### Moral injury

There are a lot of unanswered questions that you have to learn to live with.

You want the world to stop and help you, but you must learn to accept that the media, the police, and social services have all other priorities...

You feel so powerless, faced with the inaction of authorities and a society that doesn't care about the families nor how to prevent people from going missing.

BRING THIS PAINTING TO LIFE  
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HEADPHONES



1. Install the  
Artivive app



2. View the artwork  
through your  
smartphone

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Collage with interpretation and text from a relative of missing people | Through the Prism of Missing, UWL

### Keep circling around

First, the rupture to normal life, an explosion within you, like your whole life and your family's life has just exploded, like your whole life has been shredded in that wretched poster...

Trying to escape by waiting for a flood with your belongings in a box.

The word missing constantly bears down on top of you with all that anxiety and depression and cycle of hoping and despairing, and it just feels overwhelming.

You just keep circling around... going back to that again, like a broken record... we crawl into our wounds that never heal and hide...

How is that possible that that happened? This sense of the incomprehensible?

Help from people, the church, mental health support, hope and Missing People comes as a slow-moving boat... The media is a double-edged sword, so helpful but also so overwhelming...

The police, as a big heavy anchor, is dragging us down.

Time doesn't heal. Time doesn't repair. We learn to re-live each day of our agony as an unrelenting record that starts with searching and concludes with the dissolution of our world...

BEHOLD THE PRINTING TO USE  
OR YOUR GADGETS WITH  
HANDHELD



1. Download the  
Missing app



2. Watch the artwork  
through your  
smartphone

OR ON

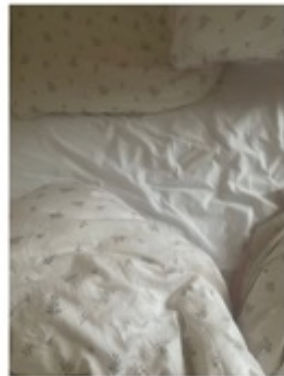
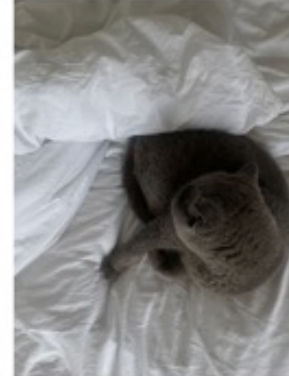


YouTube



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# THE EMPTY BEDS





## Children left behind

Children are often forgotten, everyone tries to protect them from the cruel reality of what is happening, but they suffer in silence from it.

It feels so hard to talk about it. For the families, and the communities, it feels like an open wound that keeps opening.

Yet talking and seeking help for their mental health and support is crucial for children to make sense of their experience and so they can maintain continuing bonds with the missing person.

Acrylic on paper | Painting from Pascale Waschnig with interpretation and composite texts from relatives and friends of missing people | Through the Prism of Missing, UWL

BRING THIS PAINTING TO LIFE  
ON YOUR SMARTPHONE WITH  
HEADPHONES



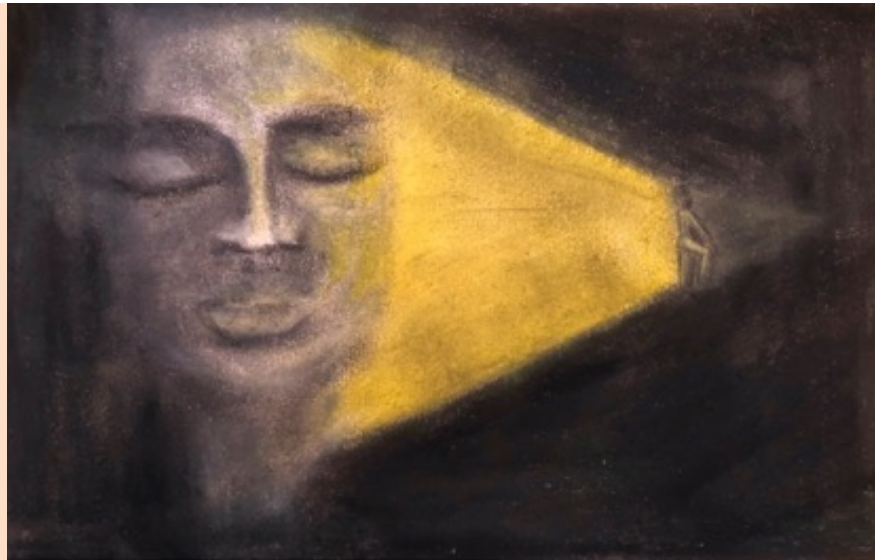
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smartphone

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*Pastel on paper | Painting from Pascale Wachung with composite texts from relatives and friends of missing people | Through the Prism of Missing, UWL*

### Constantly filling the gaps...

It's not something you expect to ever happen in your family.

Because it is incomprehensible and awful, everything has just lost its ground and bearing. It's like living a nightmare, hope is all we have.

Getting the police to do anything was really hard work...so you sort of have to lead your own investigation... But it's pretty much like looking for a needle in a haystack.

There is always hope that somebody must know something...

In the dark days, the worst of scenarios come back to mind, the crying floods are open, will I ever see them again?

BRING THIS PAINTING TO LIFE  
ON YOUR SMARTPHONE WITH  
HEADPHONES



1. Install the  
Artist's app



2. View the artwork  
through your  
smartphone

OR ON



YouTube





## MISHEARD

*‘That sensation of I’ve got nowhere else to go that made me attempt to take my life...*

*..but doctors do tend to believe what the police tell them over what you are telling them is actually going on.*

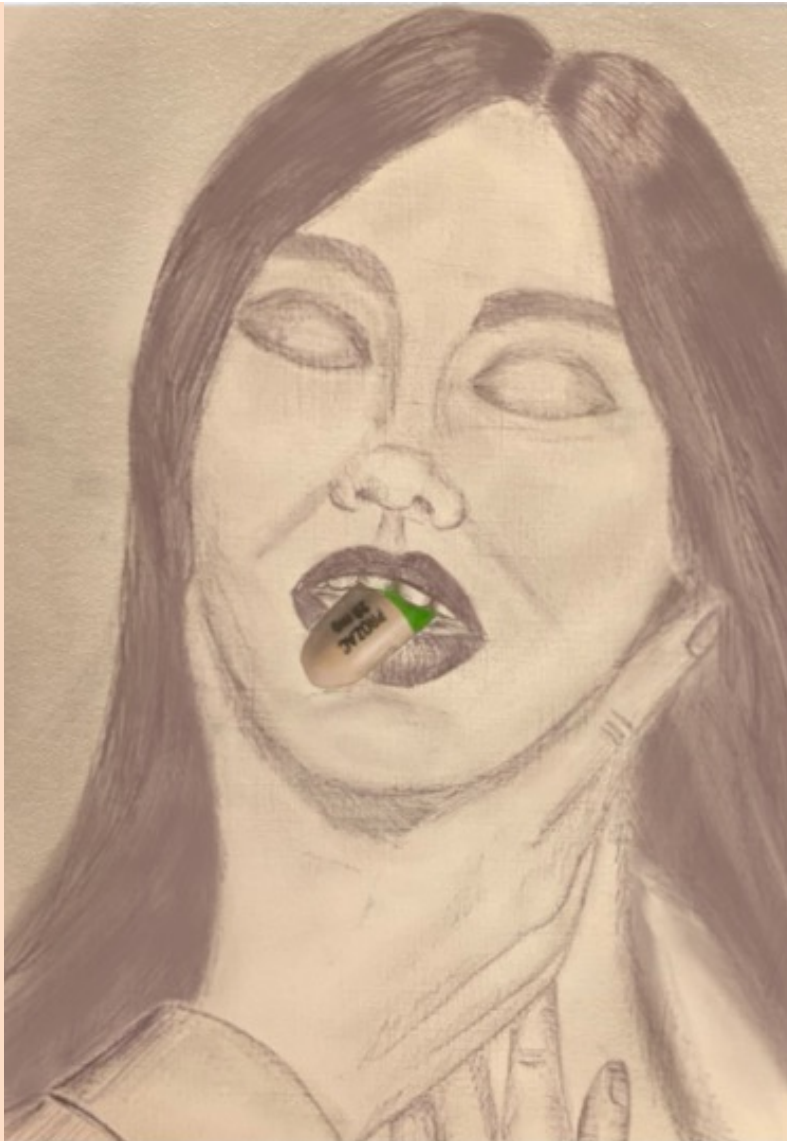
*And I think that part of the problem was I felt I really wasn't believed about the level and pressure the police put on.”*

Dad, 14-year-old son missing for 18 years

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## THROWING PILLS AT US IT'LL BE OKAY!

*"We'd like to drug you up  
so that you are calmer.*

*It'll be okay.*

*"I'm sure he'll be coming back."*

*"But I feel there is something  
SERIOUSLY wrong here ...  
it is not like him!"*

*and*

*Nobody's looking...*

*Nobody's listening..."*

*Mother, whose son went missing after a night out 29 years ago*

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Artwork App

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smartphone



## I SHOULD HAVE SAID YES

The doctor did say to me;  
*"Do you think maybe you need some  
counselling?"*

and in my head, I was going YES!  
and in my body, I was saying NO!

*"I think it's.. you know.. I'll be okay..."*

Then I thought about it afterwards.  
I thought I shouldn't have turned it  
away.

I should have said yes.  
Nobody asked again...

Mother, son missing since 1996 after a night out

Painting and animation, Pascale Waschnig | Words from relatives of missing people | Missing & Health | UWL

**BRING THIS PAINTING TO LIFE  
ON YOUR SMARTPHONE WITH  
HEADPHONES**

  
  
1. Install the  
Artive app

  
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through your  
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**I DON'T KNOW HOW TO LIVE LIKE THIS**

Because of the high level of uncertainty, it's as though I don't know anything anymore.

I've been a mental health professional all my life, people would say, she has her training to help her cope.



I mean, you can have the best training in the world but you're still a mum. You're still completely broken hearted. A broken heart is a broken heart. It doesn't matter what training you have!

Psychiatrist, whose son with autism and suspected psychosis went missing





## ***HOLDING SPACE***

*I remember going to see my GP  
and I sat down  
he never clinched,  
he gave absolutely no negative sign whatsoever  
that time was running out,  
he just was amazing!  
I had no idea that he gave me all that time.  
And that was exactly what was required.*

Dad, missing his son since 2007

BRING THIS PAINTING TO LIFE  
ON YOUR SMARTPHONE WITH  
HEADPHONES







[Link to video](#)



TRAUMA  
INFORMED,  
VICTIM-CENTRED  
AND MORAL  
INJURY FOCUSED  
SERVICES



# What research has shown so far?

<https://www.missingpersons.gov.au/sites/default/files/PDF%20-%20Publications/NMPCC/Supporting%20those%20who%20are%20left%20behind.pdf>

- 1. Crisis intervention approach**
- 2. Supporting families where they are**
- 3. Changing the narrative**



# Prevention of missing

## Early Identification

Identify risk factors early (e.g., mental health issues, poor coping, changes in behaviour, absenteeism, self-harm, or disclosures of abuse, signs of grooming... ).

## Support Systems

Providing access to mental health support, counselling, and peer support groups. Strengthening family support services to address conflict and breakdown.●

## Education and Awareness

Teaching individual with mental health issues and young people about exploitation risks, the risk of harm when missing and where to seek help. Training staff in schools and health services to recognize warning signs of missing.

## Multi-Agency Working

Collaboration between police, social care, health, and education to share information and respond effectively.



# Exploring empathy Vicarious Trauma Through Creative Health Practices Enhances Patient-Centered Approaches

## Medical students (Aston Medical school)

**May 2024 Pilot:** 90 - Year 4 medical students  
1 hour workshop

**May 2025:** 100 (60 consent forms) – Year 1 medical students - 2 hours workshop

Information on missing and families experience

Lived experience

Art exhibition

Body mapping

Case study: 1 scenario



## Nursing students (UWL College of Nursing and Midwifery)

**June 2025 - Site 1:** 24 - Year 1 mental health nursing students  
6 hours workshop

**June 2025 - Site 2:** 20 - Year 1 mental health nursing students  
6 hours workshop

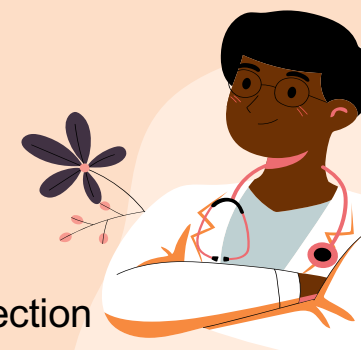
Information on missing and families experience

Lived experience

Art exhibition, reflection

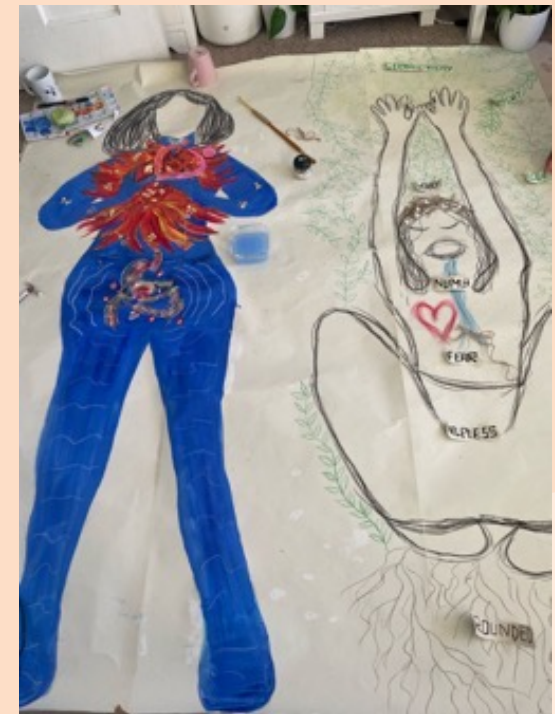
Body mapping

Role-play – 3 scenarios - reflection



Exploring empathy in Health, mental health

Exploring strength and reframing narratives for families of missing people





# Body Mapping



- ❖ Visual representation of lived experience
- ❖ Empowers marginalized voices
- ❖ Enhances communication on vicarious trauma
- ❖ Enhances understanding of social determinants

(National Centre for Creative Health, 2017)


# The use of actors and theater in Training



- ❖ Role-play and narrative exercises based on interviewed relatives of missing people
- ❖ Builds observational and empathic skills
- ❖ “Everyone has a story to tell”

(Journal for Learning through the Arts, 2012)

# Feedback medical and nursing students



It felt like a safe space to truly embrace empathy as well as express ourselves

I was able to express emotions with art, was a completely new and fresh approach

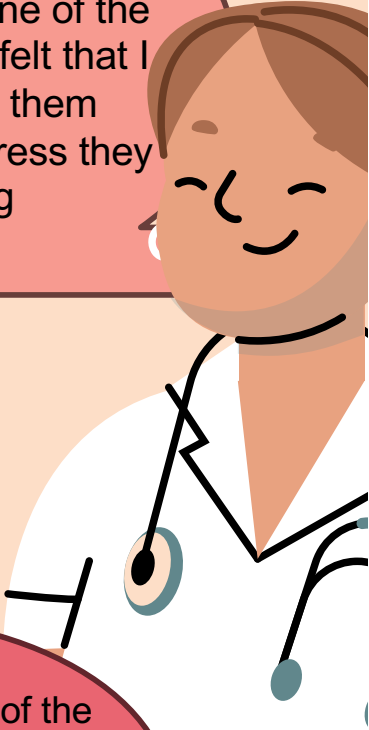
Discussing the lived experiences of a missing person's loved one was eye-opening

learning about the prevalence of missing people and how our role as clinicians can be important in interactions with families

It helped me understand how creative expression can be a powerful, healing tool—not just for service users, but also for practitioners seeking to connect with empathy and sensitivity.

It has contributed to my feelings of empathy. When I was assessing one of the people affected, I felt that I needed to help them overcome the distress they were going through

The most valuable aspect of the workshop for me was the opportunity to express complex emotions and experiences through art, especially within the framework of trauma-informed care.





# Initial Lessons

**Opening up about your lived experience encouraged students who had gone through a missing experience to speak and reflect with the class about it.**

What is the incidence of the missing experience in student population?

Do counselling teams at university need training?

**Creating safe spaces helped students talk about their placements and how personal traumas affected them, how they didn't necessarily find a space and an understanding hear to discuss vicarious trauma**

**The art exhibition and words from families allowed student to reflect and discuss the issue of missing in more details**

**Body mapping and role-play allowed students to apply and reinforce knowledge**

**How to address global majority representation in the role play scenarios?**



# THANKS!

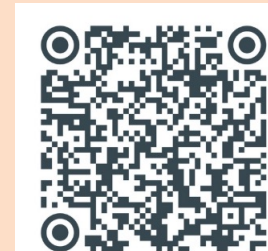
If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this presentation and would like some support, please contact Missing People on 116 000, [www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)

## Missing & Health -PAINTINGS



## Missing & Dementia - FILM

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***Trigger message:  
Grief, trauma,  
ambiguous loss,  
missing people,  
Alzheimer***

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