



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the concept of 'moral injury' and its implications for professionals in law enforcement and administrative services. (150 words)

14 Aug, 2025 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach:

- Briefly introduce the concept of moral injury.
- Discuss its implications for professionals in law enforcement and administrative services.
- Conclude with a suitable way forward.

Introduction:

Moral injury is the psychological, emotional, or ethical harm experienced when individuals act against, or witness violations of, their deeply held moral values. Initially studied in military contexts, the concept is highly relevant for **law enforcement and administrative services**, where officers often face dilemmas between personal ethics, institutional directives, and public expectations.

Body

Concept of Moral Injury

- Moral injury arises from the **disjunction between ethical beliefs and professional actions or constraints**.
 - **For example**, a police officer compelled to register a politically motivated FIR against innocent citizens, or a civil servant implementing a controversial land acquisition despite adverse effects on marginalized communities, may experience guilt, shame, or disillusionment.
- Unlike occupational stress, moral injury erodes **ethical identity**, impacting both professional and personal functioning.

Implications for Law Enforcement

- **Psychological impact:** Officers may develop guilt, shame, or PTSD-like symptoms when forced to compromise ethics.
- **Ethical erosion:** Repeated moral compromises can lead to the normalization of corruption or coercive behavior.
- **Public trust deficit:** Demoralized officers may adopt cynical approaches, weakening community confidence.
- **Example:** Police officers who allow, witness, or are pressured to participate in communal riots often suffer long-term moral and psychological distress due to human rights violations.

Implications for Administrative Services

- **Conflict of conscience:** Officers may struggle between political directives and constitutional

obligations.

- **Reduced morale and integrity:** Ethical compromises demotivate officers and impact service quality.
- **Governance deficit:** Decision paralysis or unethical compliance can erode public trust.
- **Example:** A district collector forced to favor specific contractors despite transparent rules may experience moral distress, affecting long-term governance effectiveness.

Way Forward

- **Ethical training and sensitization:** Embed moral reasoning, empathy, and values-based decision-making.
- **Support systems:** Counselling, peer support, and mentorship help process ethical dilemmas.
- **Whistle-blower protection and grievance redressal:** Provide safe avenues to resist unethical directives.
- **Leadership and institutional reforms:** Foster ethical culture, ensure accountability, and shield officers from undue pressure.
- **Example:** Ethics cells and Internal Complaints Committees in government departments help mitigate moral injury by offering structured support.

Conclusion:

Addressing **moral injury** requires officers to act according to Kantian moral duty, upholding universal ethical principles, while embracing the public service ethos of integrity, impartiality, and accountability to maintain both personal conscience and citizen trust.

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