

# Exploring Post Traumatic Growth in Survivors of Personal Trauma

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth (PTG) among survivors of personal trauma, examining the theoretical foundations, cultural perspectives, facilitating factors, and practical implications of PTG. Drawing upon insights from diverse cultural contexts, including Indian and Australian perspectives, the study investigates the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors that contribute to the experience of growth following adversity. By synthesizing research findings and real-world applications, the dissertation aims to enhance our understanding of resilience and personal transformation in the aftermath of trauma, informing interventions aimed at promoting positive psychological change and enhancing well-being.

**Keywords:** Post-traumatic growth, trauma, resilience, personal transformation, cultural perspectives, coping strategies, social support.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Isn't it intriguing that the concept of trauma defined well over the latter half of 1800s still continues to be a relevant topic today? When people go through traumatic experiences, they often face deep problems that make them question their fundamental existence. Any major life event, such as an emotionally abusive environment, or a natural catastrophe, a terminal disease, a violent attack, or the death of a loved one, may have far-reaching effects. Amidst all the chaos and suffering, however, lies an awe-inspiring phenomenon called post-traumatic growth (PTG). Resilience, increased inner strength, and a greater appreciation for life are some of the beneficial psychological changes that may arise from facing and overcoming hardship. With a focus on individuals who have survived personal trauma, this dissertation aims to investigate the complexities of post-traumatic development, the mechanisms that underlie it, and the consequences it has on psychological health and resilience.

Especially in culturally varied environments like India and China, the study of post-traumatic development among trauma survivors is becoming an increasingly important subject in psychology. When it comes to dealing with hardship, being resilient, and growing as an individual, India and China provide different viewpoints due to their diverse cultural traditions and social mores. Within their own cultural contexts, writers from India and China have made substantial contributions to our knowledge of trauma and recovery (Singh and Yi, 2019; Li and Patel, 2017). This dissertation intends to provide a thorough analysis of post-traumatic development that is relevant to a worldwide audience by including ideas from various cultural viewpoints.

Recognizing that development and resilience may arise from even the most terrifying events is fundamental to the field of post-traumatic growth. Although trauma causes immense pain, it also gives people a chance to grow and evolve. At its core, post-traumatic development is this capacity for transformation, which includes mental changes that allow people to make sense of their experiences, become more self-aware, and develop stronger relationships (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). We seek to shed light on the processes by which people traverse the trip from trauma to development by investigating the elements that promote these processes.

The multifaceted character of post-traumatic development poses a fundamental barrier to our knowledge of it. Personal resilience, life satisfaction, spiritual development, and improved relationships are just a few of the many areas of psychological functioning that may be improved by post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Furthermore, development is fundamentally relative, changing from person to person and impacted by societal, cultural, and individual elements (Joseph and Linley, 2008). This dissertation seeks to shed light on the cultural & contextual elements that influence the experience of development after adversity by studying the distinct ways in which trauma survivors in India have grown as a result of their trauma. A person's cultural viewpoint significantly influences how they react to trauma and how they recover and progress.

One example is Indian philosophy, which offers a framework for comprehending and overcoming hardship via ideas like karma, dharma, & spiritual transcendence (Kakar, 2011). This is also noticed in the significance of social and family assistance in overcoming life's obstacles emphasized in Chinese culture, which similarly highlights the connectivity of people within the larger social fabric (Ho, 1994). This research seeks to enhance our knowledge of resilience and human development across multiple cultural settings by investigating the cultural lenses using which post-traumatic growth is seen and experienced.

Ultimately, studying how trauma survivors cope with and overcome their experiences offers a promising window into the transformative power of the human spirit. We aim to shed light on the intricate web of cultural, social, & psychological elements that influence the experience of development after hardship by combining views from Chinese and Indian viewpoints. The authors of this research hope that their detailed analysis of post-traumatic development will help move trauma psychology & cross-cultural psychology theory and practice forward (Chen & Pandey, 2019).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review Of Literature**

According to a large amount of theory on meaning-making processes, trauma survivors may better incorporate their traumatic experience in their identities & life stories if they are helped to rebuild their personal narratives after the event. But researchers have paid little attention to how trauma survivors' post-traumatic growth (PTG) and the (re-)construction of a consistent life story relate to one another. My goals in conducting life story interviews with 46 college students who had experienced trauma were twofold: first, to what extent can trauma survivors (re-)construct a unified life narrative; and second, to what extent is this process related to the emergence of post-traumatic growth (PTG). Survivors who could describe their experiences in a logical fashion had a higher rate of post-traumatic growth (PTG), and I was able to identify the hallmarks of the three phases of this process. Important roles in narrative reconstruction were played by writing, informal talks, trauma-related treatment, and self-reflection. Since society does not place equal weight on all narratives, I contend that some are simpler to rebuild than others. Historical context, social norms, power dynamics, privilege, & people's social placements all play a role in determining whether narratives are present within the discursive environment, how society reacts to these tales, and how individuals may access these narratives. Helping trauma survivors reimagine their lives, making room for less-welcome narratives, and taking part in micro- and macro-level initiatives to combat societal ills and inequality are all ways social workers may advance empowerment and social justice. (Jirek, S. L. (2017)

Posttraumatic development theory proposes that there are some areas in which one may expect to see positive improvement after experiencing trauma. The outcomes of research that have focused on individual traumatic occurrences have, however, mainly hinted to the domains where development takes place. First, to characterize the development processes and results in survivors of several, instead of single, traumatic incidents; second, to investigate whether searching for growth exclusively in predefined domains restricts possibilities to uncover additional changes that may occur. Results from 26 semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that there were 2 overarching themes (trauma outcomes and processing trauma) or 7 subthemes (coping with subsequent stresses, changing one's identity, experiencing changes that are beneficial and detrimental at the same time, thoughts related to trauma, perceptions of control, spiritual difficulties, social support, and disclosure). Few qualitative research have reported on these topics before, including resilience in the face of adversity, shifting identities, and feelings of agency. To comprehend the intricacies of constructive

transformation among survivors that have endured various forms of trauma, more adaptable conceptions of development are required. (This information is protected by copyright 2020 APA, PsycInfo Database Record). (Lowe, M. (2021))

Studies on the impacts of intimate partner violence (IPV) upon women show that this kind of interpersonal trauma has serious physical, emotional, psychological, & spiritual repercussions. It is well acknowledged that intimate partner violence (IPV) may have severe effects on the mental and physical well-being, general welfare, and quality life of both the victim and her children. Further study is necessary to develop both theory and practice on this crucial area, since there is a tiny amount of qualitative research on women's experiences with and ability to recover from the impacts of intimate partner violence (IPV). Using secondary data analysis, this research sought to address the following question: "What are the themes of healing and posttraumatic growth in ten diverse women's narratives of IPV?" Extensive thematic analysis of detailed interview transcripts uncovered three main themes and six subthemes related to posttraumatic growth and healing in women's narratives: awareness and insight, renewal and reconstruction, and transformation and meaning. The subthemes included areas such as understanding relationships, [re]building the self, and new perspectives. The results also showed that the process of recovery from IPV is complex, individual, nonlinear, and often transformational for women, affecting both themselves and their relationships. When assisting women who have been victims of intimate partner violence, professionals should keep the survivors' capacity for healing in mind and use effective intervention techniques. To further understand the factors that influence IPV survivors' ability to heal and cope with post-traumatic stress, more qualitative and longitudinal studies including varied groups are needed. (Brooks, C. (2021))

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### Aim Of The Study

The aim of the research was to investigate the connection between personal trauma and post-traumatic growth in survivors who had undergone personal trauma and were between the ages of 15 and 30 years.

#### Variable Of The Study

##### Independent Variable

**Personal Trauma:** The independent variable in this study is the participants' personal trauma experiences. "Personal trauma" refers to a broad category of traumatic events, such as physical or psychological abuse, natural disasters, accidents, grief, or physical assault.

##### Dependent Variable

**Resilience:** Resilience refers to an individual's ability to cope and bounce back from adversity, catastrophe, or severe stress. To get a better understanding of how personal trauma impacts survivors' capacity to overcome obstacles and thrive in the face of hardship, resilience was chosen as the dependent variable in this research.

**Post Traumatic Growth:** The term "post-traumatic growth" (PTG) refers to the beneficial psychological changes that people go through after experiencing trauma. A stronger sense of self, a deeper appreciation for life, richer connections, spiritual development, and a clearer sense of purpose are a few possible outcomes of these changes. PTG is another dependent variable used by researchers to investigate how much personal trauma influences survivors' development of these beneficial improvements.

#### Objectives

- To examine the impact of personal trauma on resilience among the survivors.
- To examine the impact of personal trauma on post traumatic growth among the survivors.
- To investigate the relationship between personal trauma, resiliency, and post-traumatic growth in individuals who have experienced traumatic events.

### **Hypothesis**

- There is no significant impact of personal trauma on resilience among the survivors.
- There is no significant impact of personal trauma on post traumatic growth among the survivors.
- There is no significant relationship between personal trauma, resilience and post traumatic growth among survivors.

### **Participants Of The Study**

The study included 84 individuals, both male and female. A combination of purposeful and random sampling techniques were used to choose the samples. The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 30 years old.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In order to get this information, we utilized the “**Stressful Life Events Screening Questionnaire, Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R), Brief Resilience Scale and Post Traumatic Growth Inventory**”.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

A total of four standardized questionnaires, namely the “**Stressful Life Events Screening Questionnaire, Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R), Brief Resilience Scale, and Post Traumatic Growth Inventory**,” were administered as part of the data collecting procedure for this study. In order to achieve the study's aims, each questionnaire was hand-picked to assess unique constructs. After outlining the purpose of the study, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that included questions on the study, their privacy, the researcher's contact information, and other pertinent metrics. The instruments were to be explained for ten minutes.

### **Stressful Life Events Screening Questionnaire**

A self-report measure that evaluates a person's exposure to traumatic experiences throughout their life, the Stressful Life experiences Screening Questionnaire (SLESQ) consists of thirteen items. Respondents are asked to indicate the occurrence of certain events by marking "yes" or "no" on the Stressful Life Events Screening Questionnaire (SLESQ). In addition, they specify how old they were when the event occurred. In addition, we ask that you detail each occurrence by asking how often it happened, how long it lasted, and whether or not it had any major consequences like hospitalization or death. The SLESQ score is derived from the total number of "Yes" responses to each question. For every "Yes" response, one point is granted; a score of 0 is given for "No" responses.

### **Impact Of Events Scale-Revised (Ies-R)**

A 22-item self-report questionnaire called the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R) is used to measure the psychological discomfort brought on by traumatic experiences. It is predicated on the PTSD criteria found in DSM-III (IES) and DSM-IV (IES-R). The three subscales of the IES-R are Hyperarousal, Avoidance, and Intrusion. The ratings range from 0 ("not at all") to 4 ("extremely") on a 5-point rating system.

### **Reliability**

The reliability of the scale was evaluated using a variety of methods, including construct reliability (CR) analysis and internal consistency. The average inter-item correlation (AIC), Cronbach's alpha, and McDonald's omega were the three measures employed to assess internal consistency. A Cronbach's alpha score of more than 0.7 indicates a high degree of internal consistency. Additionally, utilizing structural equation model analysis—a stand-in for Cronbach's alpha—CR was discovered. More than 0.7 is considered a desirable CR value to ensure reliability.

### **Validity**

Pearson correlation analysis was used to evaluate the validity of the IES-R subscales that were produced. The results showed strong relationships between the subscales (range: 0.71 – 0.86). Crucially, it was discovered that these relationships did not differ substantially from those published by Creamer et al. (2003) (all  $p > .05$ ). As a

result, the established relationships between the subscales show consistency with earlier research, supporting the validity of the findings from the current study.

### **Brief Resilience Scale**

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) is a tool used to evaluate an individual's ability to recover from stressful situations. It is made up of six parts and was developed in 2008 by Smith et al. Negative statements are items 2, 4, and 6, while positive statements are in items 1, 3, and 5. The BRS is graded using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 denotes "strongly disagree" and 5 denotes "strongly agree." The scores are added together and divided by the total number of elements to get a personal BRS score. A person's score increases with their level of resilience.

### **Reliability**

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) has adequate internal consistency, as measured by a coefficient alpha of 0.71.

### **Post Traumatic Growth Inventory**

The 21-item Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) measures the improvements in psychological well-being that individuals encounter following a traumatic experience. The PTGI has elements like: fresh opportunities, interpersonal relationships, inner strength, spiritual development, and life appreciation. The responses are added together to determine the score for the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI).

### **Reliability**

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory exhibits strong internal consistency across both the total scale ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) and its individual subscales, which range from  $\alpha = 0.85$  to  $\alpha = 0.70$ .

### **Statistical Analysis**

SPSS software will be utilized in the research to analyse data. Using Pearson correlation One-way ANOVA, Independent T-test and regression analysis and descriptive statistics tests, the hypothesis will be investigated.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Analysis Of Results**

An organized framework for investigating the many facets of post-traumatic development is offered by the methodological technique of using survey questionnaires. Participants will be asked to consider their experiences, perspectives, and personal development paths in the wake of their trauma encounters using these tools. This study attempts to provide a thorough knowledge of the elements influencing post-traumatic growth and the methods by which it appears in individuals who have experienced personal trauma by gathering a variety of viewpoints and narratives.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of all variables**

	<b>Stressful Life Events</b>	<b>Impact Of Events</b>	<b>Resilience</b>	<b>Post Traumatic Growth</b>
<b>Mean</b>	1.80	29.92	3.16	49.73
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	1.96	21.95	0.68	26.02
<b>N</b>	84	84	84	84

The above table presents descriptive data for four essential variables: stressful life events, impact of events, resilience, and post-traumatic growth. The mean number of stressful life events encountered by participants was 1.80, exhibiting a significant degree of diversity as seen by the 1.96 standard deviation. Comparably, the Impact of Events showed modest levels, with an average score of 29.92; however, as the standard deviation of 21.95 indicates, individual views differed greatly. With an average score of 3.16, respondents showed a modest level of resilience; standard deviation = 0.68 indicates that reported resilience levels varied very little. On the other hand,

post-traumatic development showed significant diversity (standard deviation = 26.02) while being significantly high among responders with an average score of 49.73. These data shed light on the wide range of perspectives and experiences that members of the sample group have with regard to stressful traumatic situations, their effects, resiliency, and personal development. They also offer important new information for the study and comprehension of these psychological concepts.

## **Discussion**

The findings presented in the tables provide valuable insights into the relationship between post-traumatic growth and personal trauma among survivors aged between 15 and 30 years. Through the utilization of various statistical analyses, including t-tests, ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and regression, this study aimed to comprehensively explore how personal trauma impacts individuals' growth following traumatic experiences.

The table 1, which offers descriptive statistics of key variables, we observe that participants encountered an average of 1.80 stressful life events, with significant diversity indicated by the standard deviation. The impact of events was moderate, demonstrating individual differences. Resilience levels were modest on average, but with little variation, whereas post-traumatic growth exhibited significant diversity among responders, indicating varying degrees of growth following trauma.

Table 2 highlights a significant gender difference in stressful life events, with female participants experiencing fewer stressful life events on average compared to males. Similarly, Table 3 reveals that family dynamics significantly influence individuals' experiences of stressful life events, emphasizing the importance of familial support structures in coping with trauma.

Moving on to economic and education status, Tables 4 and 5 indicate significant differences in the mean levels of stressful life events among different economic and education status groups. This suggests that socioeconomic factors play a role in shaping individuals' exposure to and experiences of trauma.

The correlation analysis presented in Table 5 demonstrates significant relationships between personal trauma, resilience, and post-traumatic growth among survivors. Stressful life events and the impact of events positively correlate with each other, indicating that individuals who experience more stressful events also report greater impacts from those events. Additionally, resilience shows weak negative correlations with both stressful life events and the impact of events, suggesting that higher levels of resilience may buffer the effects of trauma. Post-traumatic growth displays weak positive correlations with all variables, indicating that individuals who experience more trauma may also experience greater post-traumatic growth, although these associations are relatively weak.

Regression analyses in Tables 6, 7, and 8 further elucidate the impact of personal trauma on various outcomes. While personal trauma significantly influences the impact of stressful events and post-traumatic growth among survivors, it does not appear to have a significant impact on resilience levels.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Summary And Conclusion**

My curiosity aside, true awareness can only occur when individuals are pushed to be inquisitive. Knowledge will surpass the awkwardness of not knowing how to respond to such situations. How else will the taboo surrounding trauma ever be removed? It is simply silence and this time ignorance should not equal bliss. This study shows the comprehensive examination of the relationship between post-traumatic development and personal trauma among survivors aged 15 to 30 years has offered useful insights into many elements of this phenomena.

Beginning with descriptive statistics, we see that, while participants' mean number of stressful life events was moderate, their experiences varied significantly, as demonstrated by the substantial standard deviation. Likewise, while the average Impact of Events showed low levels, individual opinions differed significantly. While there was considerable heterogeneity in the post-traumatic development of the respondents, respondents' resilience levels were generally moderate.



Significant gender variations were seen in the number of stressful life events reported by individuals; on average, females reported less stressful life events than males. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that family dynamics significantly affect how stressful life events are experienced, demonstrating the significance of familial bonds on people's reactions to trauma. The degrees of stressful life events encountered were shown to be highly influenced by socioeconomic and educational statuses, indicating that these characteristics may have an impact on trauma experiences.

Significant, but differently strong, connections between personal trauma, resilience, and post-traumatic growth were found by correlation analysis. Both the effect of events and stressful life events showed mild negative connections with resilience, but both also showed moderate positive relationships. Weak positive associations between post-traumatic development and all factors were observed, suggesting a complicated interaction between growth, resilience, and personal trauma.

These results were further corroborated by regression analyses, which demonstrated the substantial influence of personal trauma on survivors' experiences with stressful situations and their post-traumatic growth. Personal trauma did not, however, appear to have a statistically significant effect on resilience, indicating that while traumatic events may influence post-traumatic growth, they may not always have an impact on an individual's level of resilience.

In conclusion, this study offers insightful information about the intricate connection between personal trauma and post-traumatic growth in survivors between the ages of 15 and 30. The results highlight how crucial it is to take into account a variety of variables, including gender, family dynamics, socioeconomic position, and resilience, in order to comprehend how people react to trauma and how they might evolve after facing hardship. In order to develop more effective therapies and support networks for people dealing with trauma, more study in this field is necessary to investigate other aspects that can affect survivors' resilience and post-traumatic growth.

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