

The Positive Side of Trauma: Between Enhancing Character Strengths and Achieving Post-Traumatic Growth

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Received : 12/02/2025 ; Accepted : 23/07/2025 ; Published : 11/08/2025

Abstract

This article highlights the significance of psychological concepts related to strengthening and building character strengths and enhancing performance levels in individuals who have experienced trauma and stress. It suggests that negative experiences can catalyze growth, maturity, and personal development, demonstrating the potential benefits of positive investment in crisis management. This research paper aims to review the literature on character strengths and post-traumatic growth (PTG) in individuals who have overcome challenging situations, showcasing the positive changes that lead to a more mature, wise, and accomplished life.

Keywords: Positive Psychology; Character Strength; Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG).

Introduction

One of the most significant challenges modern individuals face, regardless of location, is their exposure to various pressures and external influences beyond their control. These pressures often exert a profound impact, leaving considerable and sometimes unforeseen effects on their mental well-being, as well as on personal, family, and social functioning (Assaf & Abu Al-Hassan, 2007, p. 68). Such exposure can lead to numerous difficulties, including a range of disorders like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, as well as other adverse outcomes, such as a loss of trust in others, deteriorating physical health, heightened feelings of vulnerability, and increased chronic stress and pressure (Younes, 2018, p. 15).

However, Bonanno (2004) observed that only a small percentage of individuals develop psychological disorders after experiencing trauma, indicating that other outcomes, including beneficial and positive aspects, can emerge (as cited in Peterson et al., 2008, p. 214). This finding underscores the "need for a shift in theory, research, and clinical practice from solely focusing on assessing and reducing negative symptoms, preventing relapse, and tracking disorder-related outcomes, to considering the possibilities of growth, advancement, and positive development" (Younes, 2020, p. 3).

In this regard, Joseph (2011) noted: "Although psychological trauma has been the subject of investigation for many decades, we still know little about the experiences of those who thrive in the aftermath of traumatic events and why this happens to them! We have observed that while some

individuals struggle to adapt, others flourish and move forward, experiencing positive change” (Joseph, 2011, *The Flipside of Trauma*, para. 3).

In this context, Joseph (2009) emphasized, "We are beginning to discover ways that can facilitate growth after trauma and adversity. Therapists should be aware of the potential for positive change in individuals who have faced the consequences of stress. Personal growth following trauma should be seen not as arising from the event itself, but from within individuals, through their struggle with the event and its aftermath." This suggests that experiencing trauma does not only carry the risk of disorder; there is also the possibility of natural recovery despite emotional distress, as well as a third potential—growth and flourishing—as a result of processing the traumatic experience (as cited in Younes, 2020, pp. 5-6).

Building on the previous insights, this theoretical study aims to underscore the importance of specific positive psychological variables and their role in effectively managing crises and chronic stress. It emphasizes the core message of positive psychology, which advocates that psychology should extend beyond merely examining psychological illness and weaknesses to also encompass human strengths. Consequently, psychotherapy should not be limited to addressing what is wrong but should also focus on fostering, reinforcing, and developing what is right. Psychology, therefore, encompasses not only the realms of illness and health but also branches into areas such as work, education, and health promotion during both challenging times and periods of prosperity, as part of its ongoing mission for enhancement.

Research problem

For decades, psychology has concentrated on examining the difficulties individuals encounter following disasters and epidemics. Yet, this approach alone falls short of capturing the full spectrum of human nature, even in times of suffering. A more accurate and comprehensive assessment requires also recognizing the potential growth and resilience individuals may develop amid crises and stress during challenging times.

Joseph (2011) attributes this oversight to a general tendency among psychological researchers to overlook trauma's positive effects. This is understandable, as psychologists and doctors primarily encounter individuals struggling with depression and various disorders in clinical settings. The main focus in these cases has often been to help individuals regain stability rather than to foster happiness and fulfillment. Thus, the aim has frequently been to move patients' mental state from a -5 to 0 rather than from -5 to +5. Consequently, most research and analysis has traditionally centered on psychological suffering (para. 4).

Indeed, therapeutic interventions commonly tend to overlook the positive dimensions of personality, often leaving them out of the therapeutic process. Instead, these interventions focus primarily on selecting diagnostic and measurement tools aimed exclusively at symptom management (Khattab & Mohamed, 2021, pp. 325-326).

However, humanistic psychology, positive psychology, and various philosophical, literary, and religious traditions throughout human history have emphasized that personal gains can be found in suffering. Stressful and traumatic events have the potential to trigger positive psychological changes, a concept refined into the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth (PTG) (Younes, 2018, pp. 6-7).

Examining post-traumatic growth (PTG) from a positive perspective acknowledges this undeniable human phenomenon, despite the varying theoretical interpretations and mechanisms. This approach moves us closer to balancing the study of both pathological and adaptive responses following trauma and crises, marking a valuable area of research with significant practical and educational applications (Khattab & Mohamed, 2021, p. 322).

Post-traumatic growth (PTG), as defined by Calhoun (2004), refers to positive psychological change experienced as a result of adversity or other challenges, aimed at achieving a higher level of functioning. These circumstances represent significant challenges to an individual's adaptive resources and confront them with a major challenge to their understanding of the world and their place within it. PTG involves transformative psychological changes in one's thinking and understanding of the world, contributing to a meaningful personal transformation (Wikipedia, 2021, para. 1).

Consequently, indicators of post-traumatic growth (PTG) may emerge as several positive outcomes following a traumatic event. These can include strengthened relationships with others, openness to new opportunities, a deeper appreciation for life, spiritual development, and the enhancement of character strengths.

In the context of positive personal development, some researchers, such as Peterson and Seligman (2004), have noted that life circumstances characterized by disruption and stress—especially following disasters in certain human societies—can sometimes lead to the emergence of character strengths that were not present in individuals before facing such pressures and traumas (as cited in Peterson & Park, 2006, p. 17). According to Seligman (2002), these character strengths can act as protective barriers, safeguarding individuals during traumatic experiences. They can help prevent them from slipping into chaos and disorder by mitigating the negative effects of such stressful events. Consequently, these strengths function as a fortress for the personality against various forms of psychological disturbances or dysfunctional behaviors (as cited in Abu Halawa, 2006, p. 8).

Character strengths refer to the positive traits that manifest in individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 604). They can appear as individual differences among members of society and are a topic of considerable interest among researchers in positive psychology, focusing on factors that contribute to individuals' flourishing in life. These strengths enhance individuals' capacities for resilience and promote positive psychological growth. During times of trauma, character strengths may interact with the stressors, resulting in the emergence of more positive individuals or, at the very least, protecting them from the adverse effects of the traumatic incident.

Seligman and Peterson (2003) affirmed that a strengths-based approach underlies most successful psychotherapeutic treatments, utilizing techniques focused on instilling hope and enhancing character strengths rather than merely offering strategies aimed at harm reduction. Character strengths are central to positive psychology as they relate to understanding the positive aspects of life and the quality of mental health, rather than simply the absence of psychological disorder (as cited in Boniwell, 2012, p. 104).

Joseph Wood (2010) points out that while the idea of positive functioning is not new, it has yet to be systematically integrated into clinical psychology (as cited in Khattab & Mohamed, 2021, p. 323). Therefore, positive psychological variables present a valuable concept and a fresh perspective that deserves attention and incorporation into clinical practice, offering a potential expansion of our therapeutic approach.

From this perspective, the value of psychological interventions grounded in positive psychology becomes clear, as they emphasize building human capacities in both favorable and challenging conditions. This article explores these implications, focusing particularly on character strengths and the growth that can arise following exposure to trauma and stress. We will review relevant studies and research on this topic to gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics.

Specifically, this research paper aims to address the following question: Can the psychological trauma an individual experiences contain the potential for transforming tragedy into an opportunity for growth and recovery?

Importance of the Study

In light of the above, the importance of the current research is reflected in the following points:

- Addressing the significance of positive interventions based on effective psychological variables in coping with stress.
- Emphasizing the importance of development and growth in positive indicators of personality, alongside the emphasis placed by research focusing on disorders and trauma during times of disasters and crises.
- Shedding light on the theoretical foundations of the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth, particularly in the context of the limited availability of Arab studies on this topic.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study can be summarized as follows:

- Confirming the effectiveness of psychological interventions based on the principles of positive psychology.
- Exploring the nature of the relationship between character strengths and post-traumatic growth in the context of crises, epidemics, and disasters.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

In the following section, we explore the emergence of positive psychology during times of crisis, emphasizing the development of character strengths as protective barriers against various forms of psychological suffering and their role in facilitating elevation and growth following exposure to trauma.

Positive Psychology and Its Importance in Times of Crises, Disasters, and Pandemics

The emergence of positive psychology as a scientific movement is attributed to the efforts of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi in presenting several projects aimed at understanding what makes

life more fulfilling and what people need to improve. Since its inception, numerous books, journals, and research papers have been published, and training courses and research centers have been established. Schrank and his colleagues (2014) noted that the field of positive psychology "serves as an umbrella term to encompass research exploring positive emotions, feelings, and other positive aspects such as creativity, optimism, resilience, humor, and life satisfaction." Additionally, some experts firmly believe that positive psychology has flourished following the events of September 11 (Peterson & Park, 2006) and that this new approach has much to offer the world today due to emerging problems and issues in society (as cited in Anastasia, 2014, pp. 3-6).

Thus, the movement of positive psychology began as a reaction to the notion that psychology had focused too narrowly on the medical model of abnormal dysfunctional behavior. In line with these developments, efforts were made to understand and improve the quality of life for individuals across the general population. During the first half of the twentieth century, psychology primarily concentrated on the darker aspects of human nature, with the study of various disorders, weaknesses, and mental illnesses taking center stage. Most research at that time focused on negative emotions such as anger, depression, and guilt, while there were only a few studies addressing positive emotions and feelings. Psychology proved to be more successful in addressing the negative than in exploring the positive; it revealed much about the shortcomings individuals face but offered little insight into their potentials, virtues, and achievable aspirations. These are the same perceptions articulated by proponents of positive psychology, which aims to achieve balance in the field by encouraging further research into the positive aspects of human nature, such as optimism, empathy, compassion, creativity, positive emotions, and life satisfaction.

However, despite this, the goal of positive psychology is not to deny suffering and the negative aspects of life. Researchers in positive psychology fully acknowledge the existence of human suffering, dysfunctional families, and ineffective institutions. Positive psychology seeks to study the other side of the coin—how people experience joy, altruism, and the creation of healthy families and institutions—thus addressing a comprehensive range of human experiences. Furthermore, positive psychology argues that these important positive topics must be understood in their own right to work toward achieving them; they cannot be seen merely as temporary strategies to protect us from life's problems, stresses, and disorders (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 105).

Ryff and Singer (2003) emphasized the importance of appreciating the dialectic between the positive and negative aspects of life, stating that "human well-being fundamentally revolves around the interplay of these two attributes" (as cited in Wong, 2011, p. 70). An example of this is what Pauwels (2015) offered as a new way of thinking about human responses to adversity and stress, viewing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and post-traumatic growth (PTG) as separate responses, each with its own theoretical frameworks. However, both are considered interconnected concepts within a single theoretical framework. Such an integrative framework is neither purely positive psychology nor purely negative psychology (as cited in Bashan, 2020, pp. 73-74).

In the realm of applied scientific life, there are arguments supporting the importance of positive psychology discussed in light of the findings from each study. Researchers in this field have interacted with numerous variables such as well-being therapy, gratitude, and post-traumatic growth, which has attracted the attention of new young researchers raised in the context of positive psychology. This trend may lead to the emergence of positive psychology as a distinct branch of

psychology, raising questions about how a separate system of positive psychology might coexist with the ambition toward integration (as cited in Joseph, 2015, p. 824).

Given this emerging importance, there has been a noted increase in the frequency of research focused on various areas of positive psychology. For instance, Rusk and Waters (2013) conducted a comprehensive review of a total of 18,000 studies, concluding that many studies have concentrated on positive processes that help individuals recover and rebuild from adversity, which can be achieved through enhancing levels of psychological resilience, flexibility, meaning, forgiveness, and post-traumatic growth. This data has been corroborated by Waters et al. (2022), indicating that many individuals [from around the world] have been able to withstand high levels of distress and suffering during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, an analysis conducted by Li et al. (2020) on the implications of word usage on social media in China, both before and shortly after the emergence of COVID-19, showed that even with rising indicators of anxiety and depression, happiness and life satisfaction remained present (albeit at lower levels). Additionally, positive reactions increased, such as focusing on family, feelings of gratitude, and faith in the future (as cited in Waters et al., 2022, p. 304).

Increasing evidence during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the positive changes that have indeed emerged among many individuals in school communities affected by the pandemic. For instance, Burke and Arslan (2020) reported that Dempsey and Burke (2020) conducted a survey of nearly 1,000 school principals during the early lockdown associated with the pandemic, finding that many of them began new hobbies and established healthier personal routines, including exercising more regularly. They experienced a less stressful pace of life than they had before the pandemic-related lockdown. Parents reported similar experiences; a study by Lades et al. (2020) indicated that providing care for children during the lockdown led to increased levels of positive emotion, greater physical activity, gardening, and engagement in hobbies. These variables contributed to reduced levels of psychological distress, such as stress, fear of infection, insomnia, and depression (as cited in Bashan and Barzwan, 2021, p. 41).

This supports the validity of the theoretical frameworks proposed by positive psychology regarding the nature of positive changes that occur as a result of stress and trauma following wars, disasters, and pandemics. This notion has been echoed in the findings of studies and philosophies throughout various historical periods, which affirm that suffering can lead to numerous personal gains and achievements. This pursuit has been addressed by major religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism, which assert that trauma and stressful events can drive individuals to achieve positive psychological changes. These principles are also present in the outcomes of research belonging to humanistic psychology and existential philosophy, recognizing that positive gains can arise from experiences of suffering.

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the frequency of experimental studies related to post-traumatic growth (Joseph, 2009, p. 335), yielding further results that confirm the effectiveness of interventions offered by positive psychology in the psychological care of trauma victims. These interventions work on building and strengthening aspects of character strengths, with findings indicating that they hold equal value to approaches and models aimed at alleviating symptoms of psychological distress and disorder. Thus, they underscore the importance of interventions that focus on enhancing and developing personality.

Consequently, positive psychology, through its emphasis on cultivating human strengths, provides proactive intervention mechanisms aimed at building thriving communities that support their members. Indicators of this can be seen through increased levels of mental health, which enhance optimal individual performance in facing various challenges.

Character Strengths and Human Virtues

Character strengths are the backbone of positive psychology, which necessitated an agreed-upon approach for research, diagnosis, and intervention as a first step toward classification. Researchers have examined philosophical and religious traditions to develop a comprehensive classification of character strengths and human virtues. Surveys have revealed six core virtues that are prevalent in the heart of all religions and across global cultures throughout various historical periods. This led to the proposal of a classification of character strengths, which are the fundamental psychological components that define human virtues. According to Seligman, these are the foundational pillars for building a positive character and are considered essential components of positive psychology (Bashan, Barzwan, and Ben Aichouba, 2022, p. 8).

Considering that positive character traits are what we seek in leaders, teachers, and students, as well as in colleagues, and what parents look for in their children and friends seek in one another, good character is not merely the absence of dysfunction and problems but rather a developed family of positive traits. This, in turn, helps build a fulfilling life by reactivating and cultivating individual character strengths and the associated virtues to achieve happiness and well-being (Bashan & Barzwan, 2022, pp. 317-318).

Currently, the Values in Action Classification developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) is one of the most popular scientific frameworks for studying character strengths. This classification includes 24 strengths grouped into six core virtues (as cited in Duan & Guo, 2015, p. 2). Over the past decade, numerous studies have revealed a positive correlation between these virtues and positive traits, alongside increased indicators of mental and psychological health (Niemic, 2013). It has shown that utilizing character strengths can enhance well-being for many individuals.

Character strengths are a multidimensional concept that encompasses internal determinants reflecting the power that distinguishes an individual, manifested as a set of positive traits reflected in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. These are inherent qualities that arise from an integrative interactive process involving biological and psychological nature, as well as external factors such as a stable social environment and good education. Character strengths serve as pathways to achieving human virtues, and working to activate and cultivate these strengths enhances levels of happiness and well-being, improving overall performance quality (Bashan, Barzwan, & Ben Aichouba, 2022, pp. 31-32).

Enhancing character strengths can arise from exposure to difficult life circumstances, as negative experiences may drive individuals toward positive change. This phenomenon can be observed in people who have endured the horrors of war, natural disasters, severe economic pressures, and serious illnesses or injuries, as well as among individuals who have lost their jobs. Therefore, despite the misery and suffering that come with experiencing crises, some individuals may develop their potential and capabilities in the aftermath of these conditions.

For instance, a study by Peterson and Seligman (2003) revealed that in the six months following the September 11 attacks, levels of character strengths such as spirituality, hope, and love were notably high among American participants, a trend not observed in European participants. Furthermore, a study by Peterson, Park, Pole, D'Andrea, and Seligman (2008) indicated that exposure to trauma leads to an increase in certain character strengths—what has been termed Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) components (as cited in Park & Peterson, 2009, p. 6).

Accordingly, the relationship between these positive traits and Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) has been explored. Peterson and colleagues (2008) utilized a sample of 1,739 individuals from various countries, and the results indicated that the strengths of kindness, generosity, love, courage, hope, and spirituality showed strong correlations with Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), in comparison to other character strengths (as cited in Duan & Guo, 2015, p. 2).

Thus, the character strengths classification established by Peterson and Seligman (2004) aligns with the components of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) identified by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995). Studies by Park and Peterson (2006c, 2009a) demonstrated that higher levels of utilizing strengths such as hope, kindness, generosity, social intelligence, self-regulation, and insight serve as a buffer against the negative effects of stress and trauma. Furthermore, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) and Peterson et al. (2008) indicated that the different dimensions of Post-Traumatic Growth correspond with specific character strengths. For instance, strengths like kindness and generosity, as well as love, enhance relationships with others, while strengths such as curiosity, creativity, and a love for learning open individuals up to new possibilities. Additionally, strengths such as appreciation of beauty, gratitude, and enthusiasm help individuals cultivate a deeper appreciation for life (as cited in Niemiec, 2013, p. 18).

A study by Duan and Guo (2015) on a sample from the Chinese community during earthquake exposure highlighted the potential for all participants to experience Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG). The study provided insights into the role that virtues and specific character strengths play in facilitating PTG, indicating that individuals who employ a diverse range of strengths are likely to possess various psychological resources. This variability allows for the maximization and application of these resources in different contexts.

For instance, individuals with a high level of relational virtue (or humanity, encompassing strengths like kindness, generosity, and love) are better equipped to obtain social support from friends and family, which aids in trauma recovery and growth. Similarly, individuals exhibiting vitality (or wisdom, which includes strengths such as talent, curiosity, openness, and love of learning) may perceive less stress, thereby reducing the intensity of psychological pressure. Studies conducted by Yang et al. (2014b, 2015) indicated that individuals with high vitality are more willing to express their fears to alleviate stress and enhance their mental health. After direct exposure to traumatic events, most of these individuals maintain psychological balance without displaying symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as confirmed by research from Bonanno et al. (2007).

Thus, personal resources and strengths associated with the relational virtue are crucial. Additionally, Prati and Pietrantoni (2009) found that social support significantly contributes to PTG. Individuals who frequently utilize humanity are more likely to adopt supportive mechanisms to navigate the challenges posed by trauma. Finally, the virtue of courage can consistently enhance

indicators of positive mental health while mitigating psychological disorders, as identified in Hagger's (2010) research. Moreover, Duan et al. (2015) established that the application of courage can directly reduce psychological stress, regardless of stress levels. Consequently, the character strengths reflected in courage can assist in regulating emotions, thoughts, and behaviors to resolve conflicts arising from trauma, ultimately fostering Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) (as cited in Duan & Guo, 2015, pp. 6-8).

Based on the above, it is clear that personal growth, which involves maximizing the use of human virtues and character strengths, will significantly contribute to recognizing the positive outcomes of traumatic events. This process relies on building and enhancing certain human strengths, which facilitates the achievement of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG).

Post-Traumatic Growth: Concepts

Several terms describe the positive changes individuals experience after facing adversity, which have been reflected in various concepts in the literature. These include: Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), Stress-Related Growth, Benefit-Finding, Perceived Benefits, Thriving, Conversion Stren, Positive Psychological Changes, Flourishing, Positive Adjustment, and Positive Adaptation. However, the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is the most widely used term to describe the positive changes that occur as a result of psychological and cognitive efforts made to cope with difficult circumstances (as cited in Ramos & Leal, 2013, pp. 44-45).

The term Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) was first introduced in 1995 by Tedeschi and Calhoun. They defined it as a variety of positive psychological changes that result from confronting and overcoming traumatic events that exceed an individual's psychological and social resources. This process involves utilizing various cognitive and behavioral efforts to cope with the aftermath, leading to positive transformations in self-perception, perceptions of others, and overall outlook on life (as cited in Zakraoui, 2020, p. 133).

According to Joseph (2011), post-traumatic growth (PTG) can occur through three primary pathways:

- **First Pathway:** This relates to the pre-trauma functioning level, serving as the reference point for this concept. It involves a significant decline as an initial reaction to re-experiencing the trauma, characterized by a decrease in post-trauma functioning compared to the pre-trauma level, where the individual relives the traumatic event.
- **Second Pathway:** The rebuilding pathway, in which the individual restores a functioning level similar to or equivalent to their pre-trauma level.
- **Third Pathway:** The growth pathway, which reflects recovery from trauma. Here, the person achieves a higher level of functioning compared to their pre-trauma state, known as post-traumatic growth (p. 69).

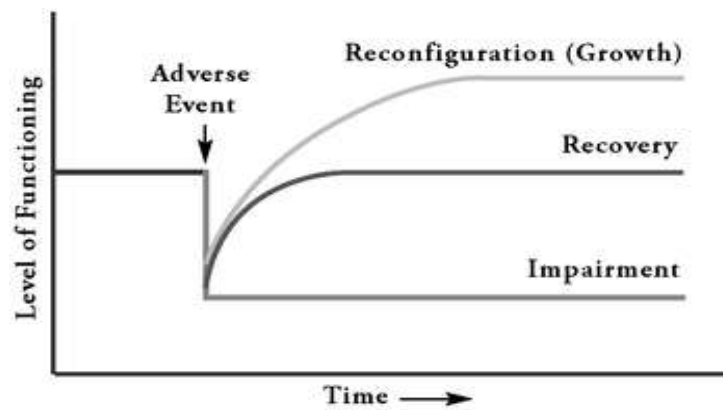


Figure 1: *Illustrates the pathways of post-traumatic growth*

Thus, confronting traumatic experiences can serve as an opportunity for personal growth, allowing individuals to redefine their belief and value systems. Post-traumatic growth (PTG) manifests in two primary contexts:

- **The Cognitive Context:** PTG arises as a cognitive effort where individuals reassess the beliefs that were shaken by the trauma. This involves reinterpreting their perceptions of themselves, others, and the world, along with understanding the difficulties and hardships they face. This approach enables them to manage and resist the trauma's effects by drawing on personal, relational, and spiritual resources, ultimately steering traumatic experiences in a positive direction.
- **An Internal Process:** PTG also occurs through an internal process that reflects an individual's capacity to utilize psychological resources to overcome traumatic events. In this context, individuals test their resilience, confront the trauma's impact, and reintegrate it within a qualitative process that reassesses their initial life plans. This approach allows them to perceive the traumatic event as an added value that contributes to their personal development and life continuity (Zakraoui, 2020, pp. 133-134).

Numerous studies by researchers and physicians from diverse cultures across four continents have documented the universal presence of Post-Traumatic Growth, observing its indicators among earthquake survivors in Turkey and Japan, Palestinians exposed to terrorism, political prisoners in the Middle East, Latin American immigrants in the United States, Chinese students in Australia, World War II survivors in Germany, and individuals affected by war in the former Yugoslavia. This evidence underscores that Post-Traumatic Growth is a multidimensional construct found across cultures, encompassing elements related to changes in self, personal relationships, and appreciation of life.

Research findings from various studies suggest that pain and suffering can drive growth, with the challenges individuals face being essential for developing Post-Traumatic Growth. The most stressful events, such as those in Kosovo and Germany, are significantly linked to Post-Traumatic Growth. It has also been confirmed that Post-Traumatic Growth indicators can coexist with symptoms of distress, as shown in studies conducted on Palestinian and Latin American samples in the United States (Weiss & Berger, 2010, p. 190).

The Conceptual Model of Post-Traumatic Growth

Some theorists have explained Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) as a “self-regulatory mechanism linked to an innate biological tendency to protect oneself from distress arising from adverse conditions.” According to Ford, Tennen, and Albert (2008), individuals experience growth after managing stress and trauma, perceiving themselves as resilient individuals who have overcome hardship and suffering.

To provide a more comprehensive view of Post-Traumatic Growth, Zoellner and Maerker (2006) proposed the "Janus-Face Model." This model presents Post-Traumatic Growth from two perspectives: the illusory aspect and the constructive aspect. Consistent with the work of Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), the constructive component represents genuine growth resulting from effectively coping with adverse conditions. This form of growth involves significant changes in personal cognitive schemas and adaptive adjustments to trauma.

Conversely, the illusory component, introduced by Taylor et al. (2000), posits that there can be perceived positive growth that does not represent genuine change. Instead, it functions as a defense mechanism, helping shield individuals from distress and deeper cognitive engagement with the traumatic event. Affleck and Tennen (1996) suggested that illusory growth aids in maintaining psychological balance, allowing individuals to avoid restructuring their worldview. Zoellner et al. (2008) observed this form of Post-Traumatic Growth among trauma survivors experiencing intense stress symptoms. As Zoellner and Maerker (2006) explained, during coping, there is often a decline in stress symptoms and illusory growth alongside an increase in awareness and genuine constructive growth (as cited in Ramos & Leal, 2013, p. 5).

In this context, Post-Traumatic Growth can arise both spontaneously and through specific facilitative methods outlined by Tedeschi:

- **Education** - Reevaluating one's self, worldview, and future.
- **Emotional Regulation** - Managing negative emotions and reflecting on one's potential and achievements.
- **Self-Disclosure** - Clarifying events and their impacts.
- **Narrative Development** - Crafting a personal narrative of the trauma and deriving hope from well-known stories.
- **Service** - Engaging in acts that benefit others. (as cited in Richard, 2020, para. 2).

Discussion

The notion that positive changes can arise from trauma and crises has existed within theoretical frameworks for some time, though it has not been fully assimilated into mainstream psychology. This idea lay dormant for years, awaiting rediscovery. However, in the early 21st century, a shift in perspective began, leading to the establishment of a new field—Positive Psychology—dedicated to exploring concepts related to human satisfaction and flourishing.

Positive Psychology introduced various terms to capture the positive transformations people may undergo, such as "benefit-finding," "growth after adversity," and "flourishing." Yet, the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), introduced by clinical researchers Tedeschi and Calhoun in the mid-1990s, gained significant attention. Developments within Positive Psychology supported

the measurement and understanding of character strengths, helping shape Post-Traumatic Growth as a structured framework. Post-Traumatic Growth provides a comprehensive perspective on personal growth and transformation following trauma, often revealing unexpected ways in which adversity can drive positive psychological change. These transformations in character strengths can prompt a reordering of life priorities, openness to new possibilities, and profound existential reflection, potentially enhancing spiritual and religious depth.

Thus, the field has uncovered how trauma can serve as a starting point for growth and flourishing, affecting multiple dimensions of the individual's personality and demonstrating the transformative potential of adversity.

Conclusion

Individuals confronting traumatic events often experience a mix of positive and negative responses, highlighting the potential for substantial personal growth and transformation in the wake of tragedy. This idea has increasingly gained traction in research, with studies documenting how those who have faced acute trauma—such as the loss of a loved one, war, natural disasters, or life-threatening illness—can experience positive changes afterward.

A review of literature on Post-Traumatic Growth reveals several factors associated with this phenomenon, including personal strengths, self-disclosure, satisfaction with social support, spiritual growth, and optimism. Research consistently identifies these elements as predictors of Post-Traumatic Growth. Various studies also show that specific dimensions of Post-Traumatic Growth correlate with certain character strengths: for example, strengths like kindness, generosity, and love improve relationships, while curiosity, creativity, and a love of learning foster openness to new opportunities. Additionally, qualities such as gratitude, appreciation of beauty, and enthusiasm enhance individuals' appreciation for life, while religious strength nurtures spiritual growth.

In light of these findings, it becomes evident that confronting trauma can offer a path toward personal growth, enabling individuals to re-evaluate their beliefs and values through the development of certain character strengths. Recognizing these positive outcomes can facilitate growth, maturity, and flourishing, underscoring the transformative potential inherent in human resilience when navigating adversity.

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