



From Trauma to Recovery: Understanding Post-Traumatic Growth

Ihsene BERRADJEL

*University of BATNA 1
(ALGERIA)*

Ihsene.berradjel@univ-batna.dz

Abstract ;

Individuals go through stressful experiences and various traumas in their lives, such as natural disasters, wars, and the loss of loved ones. Psychological studies show that people's reactions to these events vary depending on their previous experiences, internal motivations, and the social support they receive. While some people may collapse under the impact of trauma, others are able to overcome it and gradually return to their normal lives. Some individuals may even experience unexpected positive changes in their outlook on life and their relationships with others. This phenomenon is of interest to psychologists because it reflects a different aspect of human response to stress. It is not limited to resilience or adaptation, but extends to personal development and maturity. This concept is known as post-traumatic growth. It is one of the fundamental concepts in positive psychology. This concept holds that trauma does not always lead to permanent disorders, but can sometimes contribute to the construction of a new, more meaningful and coherent identity for the individual.

Article info

*Received
March 08.2026*

*Accepted
April 17.2026*

Keyword:

- ✓ *trauma*
- ✓ *Recovery*
- ✓ *Post-traumatic growth*

1. *Introduction:*

Throughout their lives, people go through many profound experiences that can leave a lasting impact on their lives. Psychological trauma is one such experience. Psychological trauma refers to an individual's experience of, witnessing, or encountering an event that involves death, real harm, or a threat to the individual or others, with an immediate reaction such as intense fear or terror. Psychological and mental levels refer to the wounds inflicted on an individual's emotions, spirit; will to live, beliefs about themselves and the world, and sense of security. Assault on the self is so painful that the normal ways of thinking and feeling, and the usual ways in which an individual deals with past stress, are no longer adequate to cope with the stress of trauma. (Abbas, 2016, p. 10)

Since trauma exceeds an individual's cognitive and emotional processing capacity during the event, it can reshape personal identity, with some individuals forming a new perception of themselves and the world around them.

With the development of psychological studies, attention is no longer focused solely on the negative effects of trauma, but has shifted toward studies of the potential positive aspects that follow an individual's exposure to trauma, which leaves deep psychological and physical effects on individuals. The historical perspective of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) goes back to earlier philosophical and humanistic ideas that viewed suffering as something that could lead to

personal benefit or growth. For example, Viktor Frankl, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, emphasized the human ability to transform suffering into achievement and personal development. Similarly, Abraham Maslow suggested that experiencing adversity can serve as a precursor to self-actualization. Although many individuals who experienced traumatic events reported positive changes in their lives, this phenomenon did not receive much scientific attention until the twentieth century. In the 1980s, some studies began to report positive changes among individuals who had experienced trauma such as bereavement or war. In the 1990s, Tedeschi and Calhoun coined the term Post-Traumatic Growth to describe the positive psychological changes that may occur following traumatic events. Since then, scientific interest in this concept has increased, and research as well as psychological scales have been developed to measure it within the field of psychology. (Zacchaeus, 2020)

However, the only outcome of these negative experiences may not be harm or disorder, but rather an opportunity for positive change and personal growth. This is called post-traumatic growth, a term used in positive psychology to describe the ability to adapt and thrive. It refers to the positive changes that occur in individuals after experiencing a traumatic or painful event. These changes can include improved relationships with others, a greater appreciation of life, and the discovery of new meaning, increased personal strength, or the pursuit of new opportunities.

Post-traumatic growth refers to the set of positive changes that may occur in some individuals because of their attempts to cope with and overcome traumatic life experiences.

The concept of post-traumatic growth does not mean the opposite of suffering, but rather coexisting with it. In other words, the individual may continue to feel pain, but at the same time, they direct their compass toward recovery from trauma and develop a deeper understanding of life and a more meaningful orientation in their relationships with the outside world.

2. Definition of post-traumatic growth:

Tedeschi & Calhoun introduced the concept of post-traumatic growth, which means that trauma has positive aspects despite the stress and suffering it causes. These positive aspects give the individual strength and lead to positive changes in them and their life, increasing their ability to cope with the difficulties they face.

Post-traumatic growth is a concept that reflects the beneficial psychological processes of people who go through traumatic experiences and is an expression of changes in life orientations and priorities, as well as the achievement of a new level of feelings and self-awareness. These processes begin with attempts to adapt to extremely difficult life circumstances that can produce high levels of psychological distress (Alexander & Oesterreich 2013, p. 831)

Tedeschi and Calhoun define post-traumatic growth as the experience of positive change that occurs because of struggling with severe challenges and

crises in life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1).

They also add that it refers to positive psychological growth and development across all aspects of personality (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 4).

Post-traumatic growth does not mean the actual end of pain and distress, or adopting a positive perspective toward the trauma, or that the trauma has become less severe. Rather, it means that positive change has occurred, that life is no longer taken for granted, that the individual's relationships with others have developed, that their priorities in life have changed, discovering new coping strategies, strengthening spirituality, and developing a sense of personal power. This occurs in the context of difficult life circumstances and traumatic events (Rafai, 2020, p. 484).

Richard & Other (2014) defined it as: the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of struggling with difficult life crises, manifested through a variety of ways, including an increased appreciation for life in general relationships between events, and the individual becoming more clear-headed and having a heightened sense of personal strength, a change in priorities, and the emergence of a richer existential and spiritual life (Abu Al-Qumsan, 2016, p. 10).

Abu Al-Jarsir defines post-traumatic growth as a positive psychological change experienced as a result of adversity or challenges, with the aim of achieving a higher level of performance as a result of the circumstances that the individual has gone through, which represent significant challenges. Post-traumatic growth includes life-changing psychological

transformations in thinking and understanding the world, which contribute to a process of personal change that is deeply meaningful. (Abu Al-Jarsir, 2023, p. 610)

Post-traumatic growth refers to the positive psychological change those results from facing a traumatic event. The manifestations of positive psychological change are evident through multiple changes in most aspects of personality, such as increased strength of character, improved social relationships, recognition of opportunities and potential, spiritual growth, and appreciation of life (Abdul Hafiz, 2023, p. 796).

A simple example from nature that illustrates the philosophy of growth and advancement after trauma is when you find a green plant growing and flourishing while its roots are embedded in the ground, causing it to crack and split. Despite this crack, growth continues. In the mineral world, diamonds are an illustrative example from nature of growth after trauma. Diamonds are originally carbon with a cubic crystal structure, and sometimes mutations occur in their formation, making them appear spherical in shape, but external factors contribute to this formation. It is formed from carbon (only) under high pressure and heat and under unknown conditions deep within the Earth. Sometimes, the circumstances and events of life cause carbon to flourish and sparkle.

(Kalloh and Tedeschi, 2021, p. 328)

Researchers generally agree that post-traumatic growth refers to positive psychological changes in a person's life after experiencing trauma or stressful events that affect the course of their life.

These changes have specific aspects and dimensions that vary from one researcher to another.

Growth in emotion and cognition, which in turn leads to positive changes in psychological and personality dimensions after a traumatic event (Abdulsalam & El-Shennawi, 2021, 1542).

It can be said that post-traumatic growth is a positive psychological change that occurs because of confronting traumatic events and major challenges. This growth includes shifts in thinking and perception, improved personal relationships, a sense of personal strength, and the exploration of new opportunities. It shows that painful events can be a catalyst for positive change and personal growth, which in turn leads to a deeper appreciation of life.

Characteristics of post-traumatic growth:

Post-traumatic growth is characterized by certain features, which we summarize below:

- Its occurrence is associated with high levels of distress.
- It is the result of conflict with the trauma and is not considered an adaptive mechanism.
- It refers to an ongoing process those changes depending on the circumstances the individual is going through.
- It is considered a psychological process that occurs when previous beliefs and coping strategies collapse after exposure to a traumatic event.
- Post-traumatic growth does not exclude the presence of distress or negative

emotions associated with trauma, as individuals can develop it despite suffering from its negative consequences.

- Post-traumatic growth requires stress and strong emotions as necessary but insufficient elements, as they differentiate post-traumatic growth from normal growth associated with time. (Zakrawi, 2020, 135-136)

Dimensions of post-traumatic growth:

The dimensions of post-traumatic growth depend on the individual's foundation and intellectual structure. The different experiences of catastrophic events that individuals are exposed to, even if they are the same type of negative event, lead to different types of growth from the trauma. These symptoms, which vary in dimension, may or may not be similar or different for the same person. Therefore, post-traumatic growth has three dimensions, which are:

Changes in self-perception:

An individual who has a positive self-concept and perceives their self-image through themselves, by recognizing their ambitions and abilities, which they trust in their ability to accomplish and achieve despite all challenges, is the image that leads the individual to change and creativity for the better. However, when an individual suffers from low self-confidence and feelings of inferiority and incompetence, this reduces their ability to cope with the difficulties they face psychologically. Changing oneself for the better and achieving creativity and originality, and expressing oneself openly and honestly leads the individual to self-

actualization and adaptation to the shocks and changes that affect them and their psychological health. Those who achieve growth after trauma and suffering understand themselves better and evaluate themselves in a better way. (Maatouq, 2021, p. 75)

Changes in personal relationships

Trauma can weaken important relationships, and may even lead to their loss or destruction. However, dealing with trauma can also result in significant positive changes in relationships with others. These changes occur in the way the person who has suffered trauma views those around them. Individuals who have gone through traumatic experiences often report improved relationships with others, especially their increased sense of empathy for people who have been traumatized or who are still suffering from adversity and hardship in their lives. This increased sense of empathy may lead to increased compassion and charity or a repetition of altruistic behaviors, which has been confirmed by data obtained from trauma survivors. Sometimes this heightened sensitivity to relationships with others is seen as a double-edged sword, as individuals discover who their true friends are, those who have remained close to them and those who have turned away and abandoned them in times of hardship. However, if the shock or ordeal affects the family as a whole, such as the death of a family member or the illness of a family member, the shock increases the intimacy between family members.

In addition to feeling closer and deeper relationships with specific individuals,

those who have experienced a traumatic event may show increased empathy toward others who are currently suffering from the effects of a traumatic event. Parents who have lost a child may become more aware of their suffering and feel empathy for other mothers or fathers who are grieving the loss of their children. Parents who have lost a child have expressed empathy for other parents who have lost a child, and they have expressed their empathy for others through positive behaviors such as sending messages of condolence, attending funerals, or providing material assistance (Meznouk, 2024, p. 305).

Changes in Philosophy of Life

When a person becomes appreciative of their life and values things that were less important in the past as being of great importance at this time, this leads to a significant change in the nature of the life they live, especially when they are interested in the spiritual and religious aspects, which have become very important. This reflects a major shift in their beliefs and their view of the world and others, and thus a major transformation in the individual's life takes place (Al-Abadsa et al., 2015, p. 184).

In addition to spiritual and religious changes, which are represented by a positive change in spiritual beliefs through an increased sense of meaning and purpose and a deepening and preservation of faith and spiritual values, where the individual finds refuge in his shock in his closeness to God.

New opportunities:

These are represented by the realization of new opportunities and potential benefits resulting from the shock, as crises carry with them new opportunities that may be related to professional or volunteer work, new experiences, or relationships that facilitate the exploitation of opportunities. (Qutb, 2022, 45-46)

Changes in self-perception and personal relationships, as well as life, are of great importance in the lives of individuals, especially those who experience traumatic events that may affect their lives. The interconnection between these components in the same person makes them a new person who sees themselves more positively and becomes more sociable, leading them to change their desired life goals within the limits of realism that they set for themselves.

Factors associated with increased post-traumatic growth:

Level and type of trauma:

A large number of researchers agree that the severity of trauma leads to more severe symptoms. Traumas are mostly natural disasters and man-made disasters, and reactions vary depending on the pressure exerted on the individual. Individuals' responses also vary from person to person, depending on

- a) Individual differences between events
- b) The circumstances of the trauma, such as its duration, nature, and events.

c) Ways of coping with problems and dealing with traumatic situations.

Two factors make an event traumatic:

a) The threat of death or serious injury to the person.

b) A strong feeling of fear and helplessness. (Abu Aisha 2017, p. 53).

Personal characteristics:

Revealing emotional responses to trauma facilitates the processing of perception because when the event is described, it becomes understandable to others, and the individual is willing to accept other points of view, as this facilitates the perception of painful experiences. Recent studies have shown that emotional disclosure of the main circumstances related to stressful events affects the level of growth reported by survivors. Furthermore, the benefits of self-disclosure have been linked to increased physical performance, reduced severity, and enhanced immune system performance.

In his theory of personality, Eysenck believes that extroversion and neuroticism are present in all individuals, but vary in degree. On the other hand, Eysenck also emphasizes that neither patterns nor traits can be judged as right or wrong, good or bad; as there are good and bad points in each of them individually. Very high or very low scores in any of these traits reflect an imbalance and unevenness in personality, and thus, as Eysenck sees it, do not necessarily lead to mental illness, but need to be taken into account and not

neglected so that they do not actually turn into mental illness. (Maatouq, 2021, p. 75)

Coping strategies:

A type of coping used immediately after trauma and associated with knowledge processing. This depends on and determines the level of growth that will be reported. In fact, the problem and emotion are the focus of coping through denial, repression, and suppression of emotion, and are associated with worse health outcomes. Social adaptation is a concept derived primarily from biology, as defined by Darwin's theory of evolution. This concept usually refers to an organism's attempt to harmonize itself with the natural world in which it lives in order to survive. According to this concept, human behavior can be described as reactions to the many demands and pressures of the environment in which they live, such as the climate and other elements of the natural environment, as well as the variables of the social environment in which humans live as individuals and groups. (Abu Al-Qumsan, 2016, p. 21)

Social support and assistance:

Social support and assistance influence adaptation processes, making it easier to cope with traumatic experiences. Thus an indicator of post-traumatic growth. Instead, positive changes in many areas of survivors' lives have created opportunities for closer relationships, more compassionate behaviors, and new connections and friendships, which in turn lead to social support outcomes. The relationship between satisfaction, social support, and post-traumatic growth arises

as a two-way process. However, there are not enough studies to determine whether social support promotes post-traumatic growth, or whether the results of growth are perceived by improved satisfaction in social relationships. Psychosocial support refers to the interdependence between psychological and social processes, and to the fact that each continuously interacts with and influences the other. The term “psychosocial support” is used in this document to describe any form of local or external support that aims to protect or promote psychological and social well-being and prevent or treat mental disorders. (Ma'touq, 2021, p. 79)

Environmental characteristics:

Three environmental factors were associated with post-traumatic growth: Gender, age, and educational level. Empirical studies indicate that women, young people, and those with higher educational levels are generally more likely to report growth or benefit from the results. Psychologically, the environment consists of the totality of influences that an individual receives from the moment of conception to death. Perhaps the most influential studies on the individual are the social environment and the human influences directed at the newborn. The first of these indicators is what the mother does to satisfy the child's biological needs for food, water, sleep, and warmth, as well as the presence of the father, brothers, and sisters, and perhaps the grandparents in the case of an extended family, as well as brothers and sisters, both male and female, and the child's position among his siblings, and whether he is a boy or a girl or an only

child. Thus, family structure plays the largest role in creating differences between individuals. It is also linked to the social environment and culture of society as patterns of behavior acquired by the individual through social learning. A person's age contributes to determining the extent of post-traumatic growth. Some studies have found that adults scored higher on post-traumatic growth than older people. This may be attributed to the fact that younger people are more flexible in accepting life changes (Abdul Basit, 2009, p. 19).

Ability to appreciate beliefs:

A person's understanding of their abilities and potential leads to achievement, success, and the ability to deal with difficult situations, thereby influencing the process of post-traumatic development and growth.

Ability to search for new meaning in life:

An individual's awareness of the value of their life and that they have goals they want to achieve despite the difficulties and hardships involved leads to positive psychological, mental, and physical well-being.

Self-efficacy:

This is an individual's judgment of their behavior in ambiguous situations and knowledge of their reaction to those situations, where they face difficulties and exert effort to achieve success.

Mood:

An individual's mood changes from time to time and mood is used as a predictor of post-traumatic growth and as a measure of its outcomes. Some studies conducted on groups of women with chronic illnesses and university students who had experienced various traumas have shown that there is a correlation between positive mood and post-traumatic growth.

Characteristics of the traumatic event:

The traumatic event is important in transforming a person's life, whether for better or worse. The more traumatic the event, the more disrupted the person's life becomes, and thus the greater the chances of post-traumatic growth.

Accepted world:

Life-threatening events necessarily disrupt previous ways of thinking and assumptions of perception. When an individual encounters traumatic circumstances, they find themselves needing to engage in cognitive processes in order to understand the difficult situation. Extremely stressful life events that challenge a person's accepted view of the world tend to stimulate cognitive engagement, but in some cases, even less traumatic circumstances can lead to beneficial outcomes. (Maatouq, 2021, p. 80)

Rumination:

In the aftermath of trauma, survivors feel disturbed by intrusive and mostly negative thoughts about the event that have invaded their cognitive processing without

permission or intent. This type of thinking occurs without the person's desire and is always associated with a high level of distress. Within the cognitive process, another form of rumination may occur, which is deliberate rumination of thoughts. Meaning that the individual willingly thinks about the trauma with the clear goal of trying to understand the event, the changes that have occurred, and the implications for the future. Both types of rumination may be experienced during the cognitive process of understanding trauma, although some theories suggest that intrusive thinking is more prevalent in the immediate aftermath (Abu Al-Qumsan, 2016, p. 23). p. 23)

CONCLUSION

Post-traumatic growth represents an opportunity for individuals to reevaluate their beliefs and priorities and build psychological resilience that helps them better cope with future challenges. It is a positive transformation process that reflects the human capacity to adapt and grow in the face of difficult experiences. It shows that individuals have the ability to draw positive lessons and meanings from painful events, develop new skills, strengthen social relationships, and even achieve positive changes in their outlook on life. Recognizing the possibility of post-traumatic growth is an important step toward a deeper understanding of human resilience and capacity for renewal. It is also important to recognize that this growth does not happen automatically or easily, but requires support, resources, and appropriate enhancement strategies to help individuals overcome challenges and use them to build more lives that are positive.

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