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## ARTICLE

# QUALITATIVE STUDY OF POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Fei Teng, Aobo Hou, Rui Xu, Hangjun Lv, Zhiyao Chen, Na Zhu, Yuqi Yang, Mingyue Dai, Yingjie Xu, Tongkun Shi\*

Jiaying University Medical College, Jiaying 314001, China

\*Corresponding Author E-mail: 82883208@qq.com

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## ARTICLE DETAILS

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the growth of people after traumatic events and its influencing factors. The research adopted the phenomenological research method of qualitative research, using the convenient sampling method to select 36 interview subjects who have experienced traumatic events. It adopted semi-structured in-depth interview and observation method to collect data. Colaizzi's seven-step analysis method of phenomenological data is used for analysis. A total of 15 men and 21 women were interviewed, 91.67% of them experienced life stress events and 8.33% experienced natural disasters. After experiencing a traumatic event, most of them first experienced negative emotions. After the buffer period, they would accept the reality by minimizing the trauma or overcoming the fear. They can learn from the experience and cherish life more. They also believed in themselves more, and cherish the relationship with their loved persons. A positive process of emotional experience in coping with difficult situations. Post-traumatic Growth mainly reflected in life attitude, relationship improvement and self-perception.

## KEYWORDS

post-traumatic growth, qualitative research, emotion

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Experiencing traumatic events made great harm to people's physiology and psychology, such as not conducting in time, and also produced corresponding stress disorder (Lu and Wu, 2021). According to the data of WHO-related research in 2013, 15.4% of the respondents had PTSD, which would lead to anxiety, depression, and bring negative effects on body and mind (Xu et al., 2021). Post-traumatic Growth (PTG) refers to the ability of an individual to perceive a new outlook on life, maintain an optimistic attitude and effectively deal with challenges and tests in the course of confronting setbacks and diseases, stress response is the result of self-reflection and self-growth in front of force majeure (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). Many foreign researchers have explored the connotation and influencing factors of PTG. Tedeschi and Calhoun found that the connotation of PTG is embodied in the three levels of Self-cognition, Connection with others and Philosophy of life through qualitative research (Li and Dai, 2014). The purpose of this study is to focus on the factors that promote post-traumatic growth and to explore the process of mood more deeply through semi-structured in-depth interviews. It is to sort out and analyze the common features of its changing course and perception.

## 2. PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Participants

All the subjects were selected from Zhejiang Province, such as Jiaying

City, Wenzhou City and Shaoxing City from August to December, 2021. The inclusion criteria described as follows: (1) Experienced traumatic events. (2) Age  $\geq 18$  years old. (3) Be able to express clearly. (4) Volunteer for the interview after informed consent.

### 2.2 Research Methods

This study mainly executed semi-structured in-depth interview. Face-to-face interview was applied based on the interview outline. After feedback on the previous content of the subjects, each interview lasted 40 to 50 minutes was recorded by on-site recording and transcripts recording. In order to collect true feelings and correct data collection, each interview was conducted one or two interviews. At the second interview, some ambiguous information was clarified. One researcher interviewed a maximum of 2 respondents per day. The outline of the interview is shown in Table 1.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

After the interview, interviewer played the recording immediately, and input all the contents stated into the computer, then read the formed text data repeatedly. Using the Colaizzi step to analyze the data: (1) carefully read all the records. (2) Extract statements of significance. (3) Encode recurring ideas. (4) Collect the encoded views. (5) Write a detailed and complete description. (6) Identify similar points of view. (7) Return to the participants for verification to verify the authenticity of the information.

**Table 1:** Outline of semi-structured interview for trauma event participants

Order	Interview content
N1	What is the greatest impact event you have experienced in your mind?
N2	What is your first reaction after the event?
N3	What was the worst plan you made at that moment?
N4	Can you tell us the whole process you went through?
N5	Have you been helped by other people, or by web or book search for relevant information?
N6	What changes have taken place in your mood since then?
N7	Now when you recall, is there any fluctuation in your mood? What impact did it have on your life after the event?
N8	What changes do you think you have made since then? Do you often think about this issue subconsciously?
N9	Have you experienced the same or similar events since? If yes, how did your mood change before comparison?
N10	How do you think this event will affect your whole life?
N11	Can you leave a sentence or a paragraph for someone who is experiencing similar experiences now or later, or for yourself before?

**Table 2:** General information of the participants

Project	Option	Number of cases	Percentage
Gender	Male	15	41.67
	Female	21	58.33
Education degree	High school	2	5.56
	Junior college	1	2.78
	Undergraduate	30	83.33
	Graduates student	3	8.33
Trauma Period	Juvenile	4	11.11
	Teenagers	21	58.33
	Youth	11	30.56
Classification of traumatic events	Life stress events	33	91.67
	Natural disaster events	3	8.33
First experience or not	Yes	31	86.11
	No	5	13.89
seeking external help or not	Yes	20	55.56
	No	16	44.44

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 General Information of the Participants

36 participants were interviewed in this study, aged 19-50 years old, with an average age of (23.64 ± 6.47). There are 19 coming from Jiaxing City, 4 coming from Shaoxing City, 4 coming from Wenzhou City, and 9 in other areas of Zhejiang Province. More details are shown in table 2.

#### 3.2 Emotions When Experiencing a Traumatic Event

When interviewees mentioned their experiences of traumatic events, they all used negative emotions such as 'fear', 'Sadness', 'collapse', 'unacceptable' and 'at a loss' to describe their emotions at the beginning.

##### 3.2.1 Fear

N8: When I saw my roommate trembling in horror, foaming at the mouth, green eyes (because of the emergency exit lamp outside the door), and incontinent urination, I felt like I saw a ghost. I was scared. N10: I didn't feel much when the kitten was scratched at first. When I felt that it was scratched at me, my feet immediately bounced up. Although I didn't scratched a few times, those times were replayed in my mind again and again, which made my brain blank. In particular, it seemed that it was a sick cat. I felt creepy, goose bumps all over my body, and a little cold sweat. But I didn't sweat a lot. It was just a cold air pouring from the bottom to the top and into my head That feeling.

##### 3.2.2 Breakdown

N4: I watched helplessly as my grandmother's carotid pulse weakened little by little until it disappeared. At the moment of disappearance, I felt that my tight string was loose. For a period of time, I could not hear any sound. My eyes had been staring at those still staring eyes. N35: When I saw the pool full of blood for the first time, the visual impact was so strong that I felt creepy, cold sweat all over my body, and my hands could not control shaking. I felt very afraid. I couldn't accept it. I thought we were too cruel.

#### 3.3 Coping after Traumatic Events

After their respective buffer periods, 30.56% of the participants chose to try to dilute the impact of trauma events to accept the reality; While 69.44% accepted the reality by overcoming fear.

##### 3.3.1 Wound regression

N15: At the beginning, I didn't dare to go out for fear of being hit by a car, but it's not realistic. I'm afraid every time I go out. Gradually, I'm less afraid, and then I return to normal. N22: Later, with the passage of time, I gradually put down, thinking that my university is not bad, and the city is not bad. Now, I think it is just a small thing in my youth. N34: It may fade away with the progress of time, and then it gradually calms down.

##### 3.3.2 Overcome fear

N17: Believe in yourself, and you will be able to overcome that hurdle. Cheer up, and use your own actions to face and make up for this regret. N31: What engulfs us most is our inner fear. If we understand and face the social malice more, arm and strengthen our body and mind more, there will always be sunshine in the shadow of the past and the future.

### 3.4 Understanding of Life

Among the 36 traumatic events, 61.11% were caused by their own factors such as lack of experience and lack of self-confidence. After learning the relevant lessons, 86.37% of them avoided the recurrence of similar events. In the process of meditation, 1/6 of the respondents no longer regretted the traumatic event they had experienced, but regarded it as a guide on the road of life. Those who have suffered from illness or experienced the death of their relatives also cherish their lives and the time they spend with their relatives.

#### 3.4.1 Learn from experience and lessons

N11: After that, no matter learning to swim in the river or walking or climbing stairs, I will subconsciously look around to prevent myself from being hit. N13: I will warm up for a long time before running to avoid unnecessary injuries as much as possible. N33: You should be more careful with the operation to avoid injury to yourself in the medical process.

#### 3.4.2 Believe oneself

N17: Maybe this incident is really difficult, but I believe that I can definitely overcome that hurdle. Instead of complaining about myself, I'd better cheer up and face and make up for this defect with my own actions. N22: When others don't understand you, you should learn to understand yourself. In this society, you should learn to comfort yourself and love yourself. If you meet a thing or person you like, as long as it doesn't violate the legal and moral bottom line, you have no hesitation and go ahead bravely.

#### 3.4.3 New possibility

N18: It's an experience in my life. It's very good. It directly turns my major and career direction to a direction I have never considered. It seems that it inadvertently allows me to find a path suitable for myself. N22: When God closes a door, he will certainly open a window. I think I want to live a good life and do something meaningful in the next days.

#### 3.4.4 Focusing on life and health

N3: I have a deeper understanding of death. In the past, I watched others do funerals and drank other people's funerals. Now it's my grandfather's turn to do funerals. I still feel the smallness of life and cherish my life more. N12: The body is the most important thing. Many goals and opportunities have been given up. Let's enjoy the present life more. N29: I feel that life is more important than anything. I cherish life more.

#### 3.4.5 Cherish the little things you get along with others

N4: Cherish the present and treat the living relatives well, because we don't have much time to accompany them." N5: I think people are weak and small. We should cherish the people around us and continue to live. N27: I treasure the time with my good friends more.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Emotional Response after Trauma

This study shows that the interviewees will have different degrees of fear, pain, collapse, regret and other negative emotions after the traumatic events such as the death of their relatives and the failure of the college entrance examination. There is research group showed that under multiple pressures, infertility patients have a large range of psychological fluctuations and obvious anxiety, depression and other adverse emotions during treatment (Gong et al., 2022; Jiang, 2021). Not only patients have negative emotions released after experiencing traumatic events, medical personnel also have corresponding performance when facing major challenges. The front-line nurses in the novel coronavirus

pneumonia epidemic may also feel nervous and easily frightened and other negative emotions at the beginning of ending the fight against the epidemic (Yan and Hu, 2022). Among them, fear is a negative emotional word that many interviewees talked about many times during the interview. Because of the sudden occurrence of the traumatic event, the interviewees did not have time to make any preparation, resulting in great physical and mental damage and fear. This feeling is also the most direct emotional expression after experiencing the traumatic event.

### 4.2 Response to Traumatic Events

#### 4.2.1 Wound regression

This study shows that 30.56% of the participants accepted the reality by gradually diluting the impact of traumatic events. Li et al., (2021) found that during the treatment period, the patients will have a large range of psychological fluctuations, anxiety, depression and other negative emotions. If post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) continues to be accompanied by poor psychological state, it will lead to communication difficulties and other symptoms. In severe cases, it may lead to suicide or violence, which is not conducive to the prognosis. Therefore, emotion regulation is very important. Xiang Mingli and other researchers found that the influence of emotion regulation ability on PTSD may be related to the change of coping style in the face of stress events (Xiang et al., 2019). By joking, avoiding recalling the traumatic experience or forgetting the main contents of this experience, alienating or isolating from relevant personnel, and avoiding going to the scene of traumatic experience, people can reduce our negative emotions (Liu and Li, 2021).

#### 4.2.2 Overcome fear

This study shows that 55.56% of the participants have eased their negative emotions and adjusted their emotions more quickly by telling others, getting comfort from others or accepting help from others. Chinese scholars have found that expressing their true thoughts to others or taking the initiative to seek others' comfort can adjust and adapt to the source of stress, reduce negative emotions, and actively seeking others' help can enhance the confidence to fight against traumatic events (Liu et al., 2021; Wang and Cui, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

This study shows that a small number of respondents overcome their fear through self-persuasion, self-adjustment, self-adaptation and other ways to develop their emotions in a positive direction and gradually accept the facts. Some researchers have also shown that family members in Neurosurgery ICU can maintain a good state of mind through self-adjustment, emotional catharsis and self-comfort. Therefore, after experiencing a traumatic event, positive self-counseling and other people's comfort and help can help the experienced person overcome fear (Lin et al., 2021).

### 4.3 Post-traumatic Growth

#### 4.3.1 Personal strength

The interviewees will gradually adapt to and find coping strategies in the process of fighting with traumatic events. The research found that after helping the seriously ill patients find the physiological or psychological problems that trouble them, they can promote the patients to change themselves and deal with the problems, carry out meaningful and positive thinking, and stimulate psychological resilience, actively seek positive energy in the disease, face the disease firmly, and make the patients have their original thoughts about life (Zhu et al., 2021). The cognition of the disease changes positively to promote the patient's post-traumatic growth and physical and mental recovery.

#### 4.3.2 Pay attention to life and health

After experiencing traumatic events, especially after experiencing traumatic events, such as illness or death of relatives, the interviewees became more cherish their lives and the time spent with their relatives. The research of Gong Bei and others found that the improvement of post-traumatic growth level of patients can promote patients to change their attitude towards life and realize the importance of healthy life (Gong et al., 2022). Through self-reflection, the interviewees have a deeper understanding, pay more attention to the health of themselves

and their families, become more confident, and actively deal with life.

#### 4.3.3 New possibilities

This study found that after experiencing traumatic events, the experienced people discovered different life paths through self-meditation, and changed their career choice and life attitude. Relevant studies showed that through self-meditation and adjustment, they can more clearly understand the most important things in life, perceive their own potential and strength, change their attitude towards life and life, and cherish the beauty of the present more, and face traumatic events with an optimistic and positive attitude (Lin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017).

### 5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the experienced person will experience the positive evolution process of emotional experience when facing difficulties, and get post-traumatic growth in life attitude, relationship improvement with others and self-cognition.

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