

## Posttraumatic Growth in Young Adults who experienced Childhood Trauma

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**Abstract.** The aim of this study was to investigate the posttraumatic growth (PTG) in young adults with childhood trauma. Data were collected from 113 students of three colleges in J city using self-administered questionnaire including scales of Korean-Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (K-PTGI). Our results showed that PTG presented mostly in the domain of Changed Perception of self and indicated that PTG significantly differed according to time since trauma. Based on study findings, promoting PTG program for young adults who experienced trauma in their youth should be considered their elapsed time from trauma.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Stress, Coping behavior, Growth, Quality of Life

### 1 Introduction

Experiencing of traumatic events is associated with psychological distress. However, there has been growing interest in the experience of positive changes in the aftermath of trauma such as posttraumatic growth (PTG). Tedeschi and Calhoun [1], [2] defined the concept of posttraumatic growth as the positive psychological change experienced as a result of struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. PTG signifies that individuals have transformed in ways that go beyond their pre-trauma level of psychological function. PTG may take the form of positive changes in personal behavior, relationships, and worldviews [3]. PTG can result in enhanced self-knowledge, increased personal strength, improved relationships with others, modified priorities, a greater sense of purpose in life, and positive spiritual changes [1].

But some evidence that youth PTG may decay over time more quickly than does PTG in adult [4]. Trauma-exposed children can be at risk for developing posttraumatic stress disorder. Thus, promoting PTG in young adults with childhood trauma may strengthen their courage when facing injured emotion and perception, which contributes to their recovery and quality of life. Prior to do that, it is necessary to understand the degree of PTG in young adults with childhood trauma.

The purpose of this study is to explore the posttraumatic growth in young adult who experienced childhood trauma.

## **2 Method**

### **2.1 Setting and Samples**

This research was retrospective and cross-sectional. This study was approved by the university Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained prior to administration of the measure. Students were recruited to participate through advertisement of three colleges in J city from October, 2013 to December, 2013. The investigator introduced the purpose of the study, described procedures, and explained the confidentiality of records to each participant. Those who were willing to participate in the study were asked to sign a consent form and to complete a self-reported questionnaire. Among 120 students who were approached to participate in the research, only 113 (94.2%) actually completed questionnaire.

### **2.2 Measures**

#### Posttraumatic Growth

The original Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) [5] is a 21-item scale that measures the degree of reported positive change arising from the struggle with a traumatic event. Considering cultural differences between East and West, a 16-item Korean version of Posttraumatic Growth Inventory was used to obtain data. It was translated in Korean by Song et al. [6]. K-PTGI consists of four subscales: Changed Perception of Self, Relating to Others, New Possibilities, and Spiritual Change. Each item is rated by the respondent on a six-point Likert scale from 0 (“I did not experience this change at all”) to 5 (“I experienced this change to a very great degree”). The internal consistency of the 16-item inventory evaluated by Cronbach’s alpha, was 0.91 [5]. In present study, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.85.

### **2.3 Data analysis**

To study the prevalence of PTG of participants, we used Schroevers and Teo’s method [7] where PTGI items were dichotomized into: 0 for those between ‘not at all’ and ‘small degree’ (answer rating 0,1 or 2) and 1 for those between ‘moderate degree’ and ‘very great degree’ (answer rating 3,4 or 5). This score was used only for descriptive purpose. The collected data was analyzed with PASW win 18.0 program and  $p < 0.5$  was considered statistically significant.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Participant Characteristics

Participants were 113 young adults (26 men, 87 women). Aged ranged from 19 to 38 (M=21.94, SD=3.40). In case of trauma type, 23(15.9%) people were experienced in drowning, 22(15.2%) were in traffic accidents, and 19(13.1%) had someone close had died. In case of number of trauma, 91(80.5%) people answered 'one time', 14(12.4%) people 'two times', and only 8(7.1%) people answered 'over three times'. In terms of time since trauma, 39.0% reported that they had traumatic experience between 11 and 15 years ago, 27.4% reported that between 6 and 10 years ago, 15.9% reported that between 16 and 20 years ago. Mean time since trauma was 11.89 (SD=5.26). In case of subjective severity of trauma, 71(62.8%) answered 'severe', and only 10(8.8%) people thought their trauma experience as 'mild'.

#### 3.2 Posttraumatic Growth

Young adult with childhood trauma reported K-PTGI in a moderate degree frequently (M=46.39, SD=11.06; total range 5-68), with an average item score of 2.79. Mean scores on the subscales were as follows: Changed Perception of Self (M=18.28, SD=5.40, range from 2 to 29, with an average item score of 3.05), Relating to Others (M=14.88, SD=4.04, range from 3 to 24, with an average item score of 2.98), New Possibilities (M=8.84, SD=2.65, range from 0 to 14, with an average item score of 2.81), and Spiritual Change (M=4.39, SD=2.57, range from 0 to 10, with an average item score of 2.19).

Table 1 shows the prevalence of posttraumatic growth. Top three most frequently reported growth experiences were 'I put more efforts into my relationships (90%)', 'I am better able to accept the way things work out (89%)', and 'I have more compassion for others (87%)'. Top two of the least frequently reported growth experiences were 'I have a stronger religious faith (40%)', and 'I have a better understanding of spiritual matters (66%)'.

**Table 1.** The prevalence of posttraumatic growth

Variable	
1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life	76%
2. I developed new interest	80%
3. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters	66%
4. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble	68%
5. I established a new path for my life	82%
6. I have a greater sense of closeness with others	74%
7. I know better that I can handle difficulties	78%
8. I am able to do things better with my life	82%

9. I am better able to accept the way things work out	89%
10. I can better appreciate each day	77%
11. I have more compassion for others	87%
12. I put more efforts into my relationships	90%
13. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing	68%
14. I have stronger religious faith	40%
15. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was	83%
16. I better accept needing others	72%

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### 3.3 Posttraumatic Growth depend on General Characteristics

One-sample t-test revealed that PTG significantly differed according to time since trauma ( $t=2.90, p=.025$ ).

## 4 Conclusion

This study is a descriptive research to investigate the posttraumatic growth of young adults with childhood trauma. This research showed that posttraumatic growth (PTG) presented mostly in the domain of Changed Perception of Self and indicated that PTG significantly differed according to time since trauma. In conclusion, promoting PTG program for young adults who experienced trauma in their youth should be considered their elapsed time from trauma.

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