



The Fruits of Trauma? Posttraumatic Growth in Suicide Exposed Military Veterans & Community Members

Melinda Moore, Ph.D., Judy van de Venne, Ph.D. & Julie Cerel, Ph.D.
College of Social Work, University of Kentucky

INTRODUCTION

- Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) is a construct of positive psychological change that occurs as the result of one's struggle with a highly challenging, stressful, and traumatic event.
- The limited research on suicide bereavement has focused on the psychopathology of this loss but there is emerging research on how people can grow from loss.
- The current study is the first to examine the relationship between PTG, perceptions of closeness, depression, prolonged grief, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- In a sample of veterans who knew someone who died by suicide, veterans who experienced military-related traumatic death (e.g. training accidents, combat), veterans who experienced both suicide and military-related traumatic death, and community members who knew someone who died by suicide.

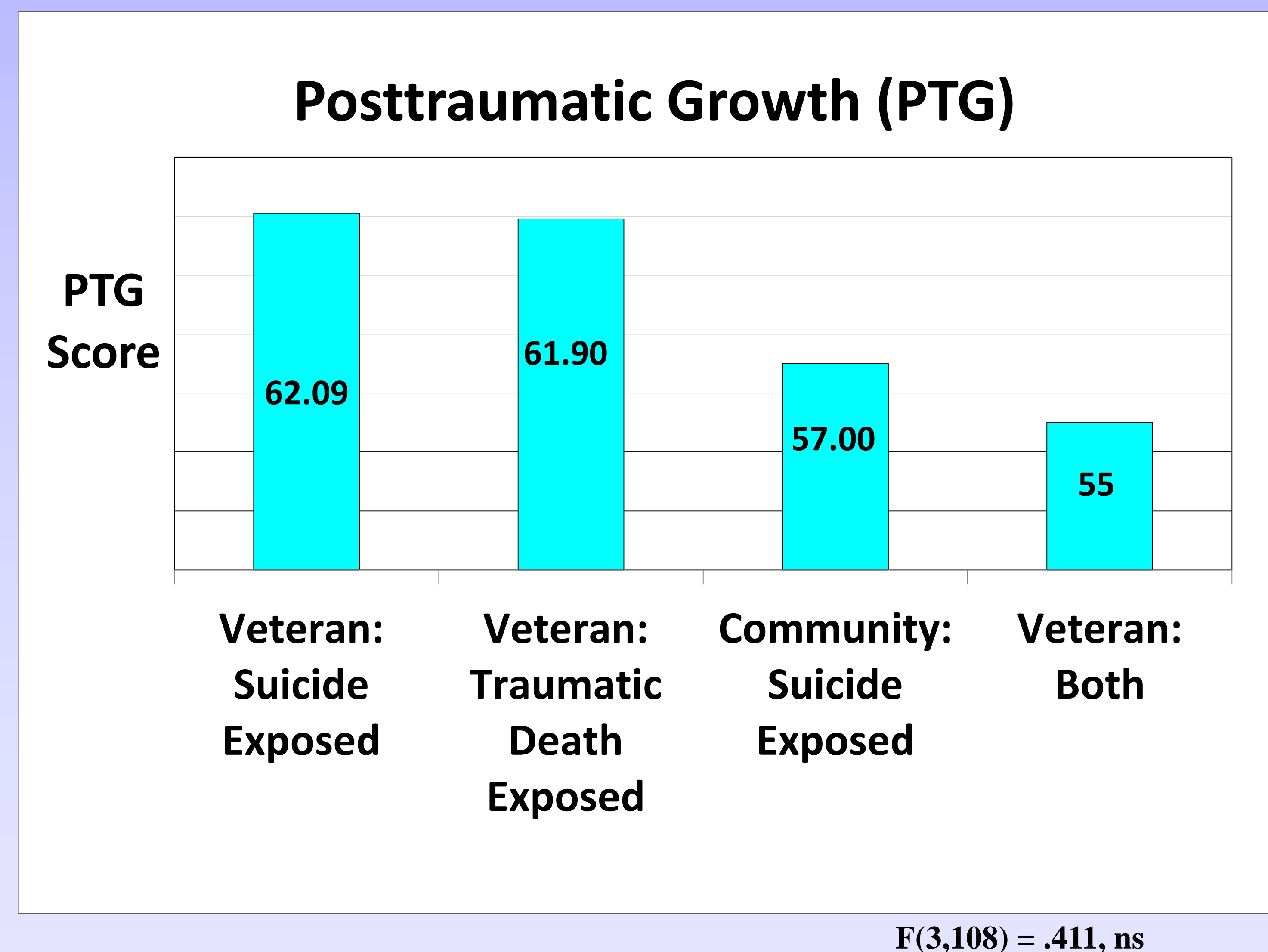
METHOD

- Random digit dial (RDD) phone calls were made and interviews were completed with 931 veterans and 805 community members.
- Those who had suicide exposure at any point in their lives or veterans with traumatic death exposure were invited to complete an interview.
- Measures included:
 - PTG (Posttraumatic Growth Inventory; PTGI),
 - Symptoms of depression (PHQ9), symptoms of anxiety (PHQ-GAD-7), prolonged grief (PG-13), Closeness (5-point Likert measuring "Not Close" = 1 to "Somewhat Close" = 3 to "Very Close" = 5) and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (SSS-PTSD).

METHOD

- This sample included 112 participants:
 - Veterans with suicide exposure (n=33)
 - Veterans with traumatic-death exposure (n=17)
 - Veterans with both suicide and military-related traumatic death exposure (n=34)
 - Community members with suicide exposure (n=28).
- The sample was predominantly Caucasian (92.9%), married (75%), male (76.8%), living in an urban area (84.8%) with an average age of 59 (sd=12.99, range 21-87).
- Tests of association between PTG, depression, anxiety, prolonged grief, closeness to the decedent, and PTSD were examined using Pearson's Product Moment Correlational analysis.
- Hierarchical linear regression was conducted.

RESULTS



RESULTS

Is Growth Associated with Closeness or Severity of the Trauma?

	Closeness	PTSD	Depression	Anxiety	Prolonged Grief
PTG	-.006	.396**	.201*	.191*	.223*
PTSD	.364**	--	.502**	.532**	.760**

**p<.01 *p<.05

Hierarchical Regression Full Model Analysis for Variables Predicting PTG in Suicide and Traumatic Death Exposed Individuals

	B	SEB	β
Closeness	-.431	2.68	-.193
Anxiety	1.39	1.32	.188
Depression	.053	1.03	.009
PTSD	8.85	3.07*	.483
Prolonged Grief	-.301	.695	-.076
R ²		.293	

*p<.01; Note: Covariates include: Age, Sex, Race, Marital Status

CONCLUSION

- Consistent with previous research, there is a positive relationship between PTG and PTSD, a disorder that is triggered by a psychologically distressing event that elicits intense fear, terror, and helplessness and is often accompanied by depressive symptoms.
- While perception of closeness is associated with PTSD, it is not associated with PTG.
- PTG is predicted by PTSD.
- Further research is needed to look at the relationships between closeness, mental health outcomes, & PTG.