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

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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

- 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

- 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.

CONCLUSION

- 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).

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>-431</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>-.193</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.188</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.009</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>3.07*</td>
<td>.483</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prolonged Grief</td>
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<td>.695</td>
<td>-.076</td>
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</tbody>
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R^2= .293

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