Post-Traumatic Growth in Suicide Attempt Survivors: A Thematic Analysis

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LITERATURE REVIEW

In a review of articles related to suicide attempt survivors, we identified descriptions of any of the five factors named in the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which are Factor I: Relating to Others, Factor II: New Possibilities, Factor III: Personal Strength, Factor IV: Spiritual Change, and Factor V: Appreciation of Life. 2 Of the eleven articles reviewed, all described at least one of these factors. Factor I, Relating to Others, was described in eight articles, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12 as was Factor III, Personal Strength, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12 Factor II, New Possibilities, showed up in seven articles. 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 Factor V, Appreciation of Life, was found in five articles, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11 and Factor IV, Spiritual Change, was present in four of the eleven articles reviewed. 2, 8, 11, 12

RESULTS

Factor I: Relating to Others

Following a suicide attempt, survivors spoke of opportunities in which they either made new friends by finding areas of common interest or relied more heavily on pre-existing relationships. Partners, spouses, immediate family members and other relatives were all mentioned as relationships that were integral to a successful recovery from an attempt. Others saw improvement in the relation to others by offering support rather than receiving it. 8 Participants from one of the reviewed studies responded that hearing other people’s stories of overcoming affirmed their hope to do the same. This also combated the sense of isolation they experienced post-attempt. 8

Factor II: New Possibilities

Recovering from a suicide attempt provided new awareness of the types of help that were available. Attempters sought out action-oriented information that provided new ways of coping and making it through with formal and informal support systems. 9 Often, these new possibilities took the form of academic or professional pursuits. Others expressed a desire to help those who also found themselves in situations they deemed insurmountable. 2

Factor III: Personal Strength

Attempters shared that the experience helped them realize that only they were in control of their lives. They understood that they could not rely on others, but that they had the inner-strength needed to keep on living. 4

New-found strengths were discovered in areas of writing, art, and exercise. Being able to cope with life with healthy new behaviors illustrated personal strength that some had not yet realized they possessed. 2

Factor IV: Spiritual Change

Spirituality did not show up in the research as often as other factors, but when it did the spiritual connection was noted as being tremendously strong. It provided a way to cope with difficulties, increased strength, supported a new perception-of-self, and recognition of the value of life. 11 A respondent in one of the reviewed studies wrote about connecting how his father allowed him to move past seeing himself as a victim of his father’s abuse and develop a new sense of identity. Other participants found community and belongingness in spirituality and various religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Judaism. 3

Factor V: Appreciation of Life

For some, avoiding another attempt didn’t initially come by deciding against it, but by deciding, instead, to continue living. 4 They realized that they still had things to do and look forward to in their lives. These things to do ranged from new-born children, to pets for which they cared deeply. 2 Study participants expressed gratitude for the lives they had and the opportunity to live them. 11

REFERENCES


8. Moskowitz, J. T., Land, B., & Joiner, T. E. (2018). Change, and Factor V: Appreciation of life. While an increased sense of self-underpinned recovery, the most prominent theme in most of the data was connectedness. 3 Further research is needed to see more direct information or research tying the theory of Post-traumatic growth to recovery from suicidality. The closest to this is a study conducted within a population, females outnumbered males. In addition, sample size of attempt survivors ranged from 8 to 539, with 5 of those studies using samples of less than 50, and another with less than 100. Of the other 4 studies with larger samples, only one article gathered and analyzed qualitative data on recovery from survivors directly. Further research examining levels of PTG in attempt survivors directly using the PTG inventory is needed. In addition, “shared experience increased the sense of affiliation, identification and cohesion with others, combating feelings of isolation and supporting emotional connections,”. (2, 19) Helping survivors share their experiences openly, providing them with information on treatment, assisting in action-oriented goal setting, exploring existing issues and meaning making, and inspiring hope can open up new possibilities or perspectives for survivors. A strengths-based approach focusing on an internal locus of control may help with building personal strength. Exploration in appreciation of life can be utilized in treatment when appropriate. Lastly, opportunities to explore how spirituality has increased their connection and value on life can also be used in treatment and open discussion with attempt survivors.

CONCLUSIONS

The trauma an individual may face from a suicide attempt may take a toll on an individual. Post traumatic growth after a suicide attempt can be achieved through a process of the five factors named in the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which are Factor I: Relating to Others, Factor II: New Possibilities, Factor III: Personal Strength, Factor IV: Spiritual Change, and Factor V: Appreciation of Life.