

Post-traumatic growth after serious illness: A thematic analysis study

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Background: That a diagnosis of, and treatment to cancer brings along shock, distress and possible long-term negative life changes is very clear from human experience and research alike. But such an experience can also relate to positive life changes, as increasing research on the aftermath of serious illness diagnosis consistently shows. Observations of positive outcomes linked to quality of life are increasingly being found in cancer studies. These results seem to converge with Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) which emphasize positive life changes as resulting from considerable life-changing events that are borne from crises or trauma.

Objectives: Aims to this study were to 1) investigate the holistic impact and ramifications of PTG on the recovery from serious illness such as cancer; 2) clarify the relationship, if any, of PTG with mental health outcomes; and 3) how is PTG strengthened or otherwise, when one is faced by such life-changing event.

Methods: Using a Thematic Analysis design, we investigated how the diagnosis of, and treatment to cancer and other serious illness impacted the patients and survivors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who had received treatment for breast (n=3), MSS (n=1), ovarian (n=2), bone (n=2), H. Lymphoma (n=1), Liver (n=1). Using descriptive mapping, we clarified whether this study results are consistent with Tedeschi and Calhoun's PTG framework.

Results: Findings charted on the key factors of PTG.

Conclusions: Serious illness results in varied consequences and in negative and positive adjustments. Further development of findings which charted on major PTG dimensions is warranted.

Keywords: Serious illness, Cancer, Posttraumatic growth, Coping, PTG, Health.

Biography

Michael Galea, PhD is a clinical psychologist and senior lecturer at the Department of Mental Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Malta. He studied at the University of London, UK, and University of Loyola, Maryland, USA, from where he read for his doctorate, with a study focusing on child abuse in Malta. He has worked in UK, USA, Kenya and Malta. His research focuses areas on mental health, childhood trauma, spirituality, burnout and stress at work, and post-traumatic growth. He has published a number of books, with the latest on the importance of balance in life, presently in print, in the Maltese language. A new publication in English is in the making as well. He is also a regular guest on a live TV show in Malta, on mental health topics. He has published a number of peer-reviewed journal articles, with the latest one published on Journal of Family Therapy dealing with Adult Children of Alcoholic Parents (AOCA). He has a YouTube channel, Psychology Minute with Michael Galea, which presently is being revamped. He hails from the Mediterranean island of Malta, is married and has 8 year old twins, Marie and Jean Paul.

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