

Personal growth follows trauma for most soldiers

April 27 2015, by Bill Hathaway



More than half of soldiers who experience trauma also report strong psychological benefits, such as stronger intimate relationships, spiritual growth, and a greater appreciation of life because of their difficult experiences.

However, this "post-traumatic growth" effect can fade over time and may elude soldiers who have experienced either too little or too much traumatic stress, Yale researchers report in the journal *Depression and Anxiety*.

The reported growth includes developing a greater appreciation of life and a sense of personal strength, a deeper appreciation of personal relationships, and positive spiritual experiences.

"I think that it is important for people who treat [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD) to know that success is not just an absence of negative symptoms, but that [traumatic events](#) can stimulate growth and ultimately lead to improved mental health," said Jack Tsai, assistant professor psychiatry at Yale, psychologist at the Veterans Affairs Connecticut Healthcare System, and lead author of the study. "There may be a silver lining with trauma."

In fact, this sense of personal growth is strongest in veterans with lingering PTSD symptoms, according to the study.

In an earlier survey of veterans, 60% reported at least moderate personal growth in response to the worst trauma they had experienced. In a two-year follow-up study, half of these veterans maintained this level of personal growth, but for others, positive [psychological benefits](#) tended to fade in the absence of new or continued trauma. Those who experienced medical problems and lingering PTSD symptoms, while also being altruistic and having an active lifestyle, were more likely to maintain a sense of personal growth.

"This suggests that new or continued trauma-related distress can promote the restructuring and rebuilding of beliefs about oneself and the world," the authors noted.

Other factors that predicted whether people maintained or increased [personal growth](#) was whether they believed they had a purpose in life, felt gratitude, and were intrinsically religious.

More information: "Longitudinal course of posttraumatic growth among u.s. military veterans: results from the national health and resilience in veterans study." *Depress Anxiety*. DOI: [10.1002/da.22371](https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22371)

Provided by Yale University

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