

Post-traumatic growth of violent crime victims in a high crime area in South Africa

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Preface

“All suffering prepares the soul for vision.” – Martin Buber

I was greatly honoured to be one of the candidates for an academic programme that brought change in people’s lives. The MAPP programme guided me on a path of new possibilities, and it was true testimony that life is worth living. The programme taught me that vulnerabilities are sometimes the positive features of life: challenges equal personal strengths, hate equals love, ignorance equals mindfulness, defeat equals winning, resistance equals change, anger equals assertiveness, mistrust equals trust, sadness equals happiness, and more. The programme is truly representative of meaningful change.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people:

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- Prof. Stephanie Nowack for helping in co-coding my qualitative data analysis.
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- My fellow MAPP students in the class of 2016: thank you for taking this journey of new possibilities with me. We shared good moments and learned from one another's experiences. I will remember you for the rest of my life.
- The research participants of Cosmo City Baptist Church for finding the personal strength to narrate your stories.
- Father God and Almighty Jesus for watching over me.

Declaration

I, Siphiwe Moshugi, declare that the mini-dissertation “Post-traumatic growth of violent crime victims in a high crime area in South Africa” is my own work and that the interviews reported on, and opinions expressed in, this work are those of the author and in line with relevant literature references as shown in the list of references.

I, furthermore, declare that the contents of this research were not and will not be submitted for any other qualification(s) at other institutions.

SIPHIWE MOSHUGI

May 2019

Permission of Supervisor

I, Chrizanne van Eeden, hereby give permission to Siphwe Maria Moshugi to submit this document as a mini-dissertation for the qualification MA in Positive Psychology.

Furthermore, I confirm that this mini-dissertation has been written in the article format that is in line with the 2017 General Academic Rules (4.2.3.3, 4.3.1.3, and 4.4.1) of the North-West University.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue grid background. The signature reads "C. van Eeden." with a period at the end.

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To whom it may concern

I hereby declare that I language-edited the content of the mini-dissertation "Post-traumatic growth of violent crime victims in a high crime area in South Africa" by Siphiwe Maria Moshugi. I am an accredited editor with the South African Translators' Institute (SATI Member No.: 1000193).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Baker', is written over a dashed horizontal line.

Hendia Baker

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Summary

The study aimed to qualitatively examine the post-traumatic growth (PTG) of victims of violent crimes by using interviews to explore possible factors that might have contributed to their growth and factors that might have prevented them from growing. However, the study did not ignore any of their negative experiences of trauma that could still be prevalent. The Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) was used to assess their PTG, and the scores were qualitatively interpreted.

A literature study informed the problem statement and indicated the high levels of violent crime in South Africa. A serious consequence of high levels of crime in a society is the fear of crime (FoC) phenomenon conceptualised by Jackson (2004) and Eagle (2015). As a sub-clinical condition in societies ridden with crime, FoC has been linked with features of psychological distress and has symptoms similar to those in the experience of actual trauma.

Theoretical views of trauma and the physical and psychological outcomes of experiencing trauma were discussed. After this, the PTG construct, its conceptualisation and theoretical framework, and research conducted into PTG were explicated. Fields associated with PTG and application areas of PTG were discussed next. The literature overview led to the formulation of a research question: what factors that either enable or inhibit PTG in victims of violent crimes can be identified by qualitatively exploring their shared lived experiences in this regard and by evaluating their responses on the PTGI? Research aims were to:

- qualitatively, by means of interviews, identify either enabling or inhibiting factors for PTG from the shared lived experiences of victims a year or more after having experienced violent crime; and
- measure the PTG of participants with the PTGI in order to use their scores to identify those who reported PTG and those who did not and to qualitatively analyse the results. The individual scores would also be discussed with participants.

The research design was an exploratory descriptive qualitative design. In-depth interviews lasting about 60 to 90 minutes were used as the primary means of collecting data from the violent crime victims. The study used a qualitative in-depth interview format in order to get an informed perspective on the research question about post-traumatic growth of violent crime victims (Jugder, 2016). Qualitative interviews give insight into a social phenomenon, as they allow the respondents to reflect and reason on the subject in different ways (Folkestadt, 2008). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) state that such interviews are preferable, since they allow participants to speak freely and in their own way about their

experiences with the phenomenon of PTG. The PTGI was used as a source of information, not as a data-gathering instrument for statistical analysis purposes. The participants' levels of PTG as indicated by the PTGI contributed to qualitative analysis and interpretation. Participants received full feedback about their scores on the PTGI.

Violent crimes affect the emotional and psychological well-being of most individuals in South Africa. The participants in this study were recruited from the Cosmo City Baptist Church in Johannesburg, South Africa. The specific area was selected because it is known for its high crime levels, and people living there have reported trauma-related incidents and experiences to the pastor and at the congregation meetings. The pastor assisted in the recruitment of participants. The only participants involved in this study were those who met the inclusion criteria, who willingly agreed to discuss their experienced trauma and possible growth that flowed from it, and who signed the consent form of the study. Eleven participants were selected.

The results of thematic content analysis of the transcribed interviews were that most participants showed aspects of growth on the PTG components of relations with others, appreciation for life, personal strength, spirituality, and finding new possibilities, while some participants experienced factors that impeded or hindered their PTG in the areas of relationships with others, appreciation for life, personal strength, and finding new possibilities. Spirituality seemed to enable all participants towards PTG. Scores on the PTGI were interpreted in line with the corresponding components of PTG and indicated stronger PTG than what was reported in the discussion.

Results were discussed and linked to related literature, and a concluding discussion of the findings was also provided. A final chapter gave the conclusions and recommendations flowing from the study and indicated the limitations of the research. The study answered the research question and met the research aims.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE BACKGROUND TOTHE STUDY

Keywords: post-traumatic growth, post-traumatic stress, South Africa, trauma, victims, violent crimes

The study aimed to qualitatively study the post-traumatic growth of violent crime victims by exploring possible factors that had contributed to their growth and factors that might have prevented them from growing. The mini-dissertation is presented in three chapters. Firstly, Chapter 1 discusses the problem statement and the literature overview of the study. Secondly, Chapter 2 describes the research results in an article format. Lastly, Chapter 3 presents the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations drawn from the study. Since Chapter 1 gives the literature background, some duplication of the literature may occur in Chapters 2 and 3 of the study.

Violent crimes are a major cause of physical, social, and psychological trauma for South African citizens, especially in the big cities such as Johannesburg, and such violence is of grave concern to the government, police, communities, and health professionals. Many people have experienced traumatic events as either witnesses or victims of violent crimes (Jooste & Maritz, 2014), and the question arises whether these individuals will be able to grow from their adversities or whether they will become emotionally stuck as a result of these. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), there is a long tradition in the mental health sciences, reaching as far back as World War I, of studying the responses of people who have faced traumatic circumstances and of finding ways to restore them to psychological health. The main focus of Tedeschi and Calhoun's work on post-traumatic growth showed that many of the people who had struggled with trauma eventually reported changes that they regarded as positive (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006).

Problem Statement of the Study

The current research was motivated, firstly, by the researcher's concern about the number of reported crime-related traumatic incidents experienced by people in her community and whether or not these individuals would psychologically recover from their trauma. Secondly, the researcher is a former psychiatric nurse, and she is presently a registered psychological counsellor, who has counselled some traumatised clients and has seen how their lives and families were affected by the violent crimes experienced. However, she has often witnessed that some people recover from their adversities and has wondered what enables them towards growth, while others do not overcome the trauma that befell them.

Statistics in South Africa reported by the 2015/16 crime factsheet statistics on violent crimes show that incidences are increasing at an alarming rate. The factsheet statistics show the following incidences: murder and attempted murder, 18673; sexual assault, 51895; assault, 165958; robbery, 54110; house burglary, 250606; and car and motorcycle theft, 53809 (http://www.factsheet-southafrica'2015/16_crime_statistics). These statistics raise concerns in all and sundry about the effects of violent crimes on the lives of individuals and families. Selenga and Jooste (2015) explored the experiences of youth victims of physical

violence attending a community health centre in Cape Town. The area in which they live has the fastest-growing crime rate for rape and gun-related incidents. The results showed that experiencing violent crimes had a severely negative impact on the participants and that they used various defence mechanisms to deal with their trauma. Another study that was conducted with abused children indicated that when a person was exposed to violent crimes such as sexual abuse, there was a vulnerability to further trauma and to presenting with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2012). Research that was conducted among communities historically affected by political violence in KwaZulu-Natal analysed the life narratives of victims of political crimes (Manda, 2015). The thematic analysis of these life narratives revealed that, besides the bio-psychological effects experienced during and after the trauma, victims sustained moral and spiritual harm. Trauma affected their lives emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and morally, as well as in their relationships with themselves and with others. Therefore, the authors argue that the effects of trauma on individuals need to be understood holistically (Manda, 2015). The list of reported studies on violent crimes is endless, and from the above-mentioned facts, it is evident that violent crimes are the major factors that seem to affect people's psychological health and well-being in South Africa.

Violent crimes affect most people in South Africa at some stage or another, and individuals often live in fear of becoming victims of these violent crimes. Fear of crime (FoC) research has even linked the phenomenon of fear of crime to the development of psychological trauma. Eagle (2015) indicates that one of the sub-clinical features among urban people is a high level of fear of crime (FoC), a construct that is usually studied by sociologists and criminologists, but that has raised much interest in psychologists more recently (Jackson, 2004). Studies assessing fear of crime have indicated an overall increase in anxiety levels of urban people over several years and found a link between the perception of crime and feelings associated with exposure to actual psychological trauma (Jackson, 2004). Apart from living in fear, trauma and even fear-related trauma place excessive demands on people's existing coping strategies and create disruption of many aspects of their psychological functioning. Emotional psychological trauma is believed to be the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter the sense of security of victims of violent crimes, making them feel helpless and vulnerable in a non-dangerous situation (Schon, Gower & Kotzer, 2005).

Among those who study trauma, there has been a paradigm shift in recent years from investigating past traumatic pathology to researching positive psychological change resulting from a struggle with traumatic experiences that may occur in a variety of the population. The view that individuals can experience positive effects following highly stressful events is conceptualised by means of a number of themes, for example, benefit finding, post-traumatic

growth, and stress-related growth (Park & Helgeson, 2006). This study focuses on post-traumatic growth as the preferred framework in which post-traumatic growth assumes that there can be personal gain in human suffering. Finding something positive in human suffering has been the intent of many religions and cultures over millennia (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006), and many studies have indicated varied positive changes following a wide range of stress-laden experiences (Linley & Joseph, 2004). This present study shares the assumption of the studies mentioned, namely, that people can cope with, and show resilience in, the aftermath of trauma and can eventually experience post-traumatic growth flowing from their engagement with the trauma-related processes.

Literature Framework for the Study

The following part discusses selected literature on trauma, post-traumatic growth, and related concepts. A review of literature is aimed at contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified. Such a study further demonstrates the underlying assumptions of the general questions in the field of research (Devi, 2017; DeVos, Strydom & Fouche, 2005).

The effects of violent crime

Violent crimes affect most individuals negatively, and therefore, it is important to understand the emotional and psychological trauma caused by crime in victims. According to Block (1981), violent crime is a social behaviour including at least two factors and their reciprocal action; hence, it refers to both violence and a crime. Felson (2009) states that a crime takes into account rule breaking, while violence involves an intentional offence using physical means. Violence is regarded as the use of force and injustice to societies that should be prevented by the law (Riedel & Welsh, 2002); therefore, victimisation is a traumatic event resulting in consequential levels of psychological trauma (Atkeson, Calhoun, Resick & Ellis, 1998). Green and Diaz (2007) found that psychological stress was a main control response in victims of crime. It remains a dormant factor among victims of crime, and its symptoms involve four signs, namely, depression, PTSD, anger, and anxiety. The authors mention that subjection to violence, furthermore, carries a risk of these psychological strains.

Trauma and traumatic effects

Bloom (1999) states that emotional trauma occurs when an unanticipated, devastating, and shattering emotional storm or series of storms, without warning, affect the person from outside, while Terr (1990) mentions that, although traumatic events are exterior, they quickly become absorbed into the mind. Van der Kolk (1989) makes a similar point that traumatising occurs when both inside and outside resources are insufficient to cope with surfaced threat. All the authors emphasise that it is not the trauma itself that affects and causes permanent harm, but how the individual's mind and body react in their own unique

way to traumatic experience, in combination with the different responses of the individual's social group. Lancaster, Teeters, Gros and Back (2016) reiterate that trauma is complex and that it occurs following exposure to adversity.

Bisson, Cosgrove, and Roberts (2015) demonstrated that individuals reacted to adversity differently, with there being some individuals who did not experience serious distress, while others experienced stress that would eventually lead to trauma. Furthermore, Bisson et al. mention the well-known basic defensive mechanism in encountering danger as the fight-or-flight reaction. Whenever individuals recognise that they are in danger, their bodies have an enormous reaction that affects all the organ systems. This change in every area of their primary performance is so sudden and striking that, in many ways, they are not the same people when they are scared as when they are calm. Every incident of threat establishes a link to every other episode of danger in their brain, so the more threat they are exposed to, the more reactive they are to being threatened. With each event of fight-or-flight, the brain forms a complex system of links that is activated with each new threatening experience (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Janis (1982) argues that individuals cannot think clearly when they are under severe trauma and that they do not take time towards a proper resolution. As a result, their resolution is rigid and distorted, conducted towards reacting, and often inadequately done. In such circumstances, victims of violent crime will indicate a lack of rationality and inability to speak on a thought. Graphic memory and recall after trauma are another challenge that victims of crimes experience. Bloom (1999) describes that, when people are shattered with fear, they are unable to speak about the traumatic event or they cannot relate their traumatic experience in a well-coordinated sequence. The traumatic incident affects the victim's brain switch to a way of thinking and of processing information that may be sufficient while experiencing the event of a threat, but the strong resemblance, effect, and impact do not go away because they are engraved in the individual's recollections. Supporting this notion of troublesome memories due to trauma, Herman (1992) indicates that the ordinary response to trauma is to remove it from the mind, but it is not possible for individuals who are victims of crime to ignore the trauma that they experienced. Herman emphasises that, for such individuals to regain a balance and recover in their lives, they need to recollect and be sincere in speaking about their trauma.

In describing the effects of trauma, Schiraldi (2009) explains the process of dissociation in victims of crimes while experiencing trauma. The author mentions that dissociation occurs as a shield against suffering a painful experience. Dissociation is a disturbance in the usually unified functions of reaction, remembrance, or perception of the environment, and trauma can result in dissociation due to its threatening nature (Schiraldi,

2009). Individuals who experience trauma could disconnect from their affect about the experiences and show reduced feelings. More commonly, people who experience trauma may dissociate, or experience diminished emotional reaction because of the threat that such emotions may disrupt continued functioning. Van der Kolk (2014) emphasises that people's feelings are intimately connected to facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures, so that they show feelings that they are consciously trying to conceal. Feelings of expression are influenced by values, norms, and cultures. Pennebaker (1997) states that emotions are innate parts of people's evolutionary, biological heritage and cannot be withdrawn, only transformed. Pennebaker also points out that unexpressed emotions may be dangerous to one's psychological and physical health. Emotional dissociation makes people feel deserted and useless and may lead to increased feelings of being removed and isolated and even to suicide, as the coping skills that are helpful to pull through under these conditions of traumatic stress are weakened (Bloom, 1999).

In addition, Pohar and Agaez (2017) mention that people who are traumatised show symptoms of avoidance. Such individuals will avoid situations that remind them of their trauma and will experience intrusion in the form of flashbacks and nightmares, two of the interacting and escalating aspects of post-traumatic stress syndrome. The victims of violent crime may experience some or all of these symptoms of trauma having an impact on their lives, and they may feel more and more alienated from everything that gives their lives meaning such as other people, a sense of direction, a sense of spirituality, and a sense of community (Schiraldi, 2009). The word "trauma" is derived from the Greek word meaning "wound", and victims of violent crime may associate the perception of this woundedness with pain, shock, disillusionment, and other life-altering experiences (Swart, 2014). According to Bicknell-Hentges and Lynch (2009), counsellors and practitioners working with trauma need to understand the emotional/behavioural signs and symptoms of trauma as well as the impact of psychological trauma within the body. Trauma is a bio-psychological and spiritual response to a terrible event. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical, while the longer-term reaction may cause PTSD (Shalev, Liberzon & Marmar, 2017).

The paradox of post-traumatic stress disorder and post-traumatic growth

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) mention that there is a general perception that subjection to a traumatic incident may expose victims to developing PTSD. For some people, experiences of trauma can overwhelm their subsequent assumptive world view (Finkelhor, 1994; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Schuettler and Boals (2011), however, indicate that individual reactions to trauma vary greatly, as illustrated in Figure 1, and although some individuals appear fairly unaffected by events, others report a range of positive and/or negative trauma outcomes (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006, 2008; Helgeson, Reynold & Tomich, 2006; Linley & Joseph,

2006). Adverse symptoms associated with PTSD have been described as anxiety, fatigue, depression, and withdrawal, whereas positive changes may include closer relationships with family and greater appreciation for life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; 2004).



Figure 1: Coexistence of post-traumatic stress disorder and post-traumatic growth (Hanson, 2015)

The conceptual model of post-traumatic growth (PTG)

Although the term “post-traumatic growth” was introduced by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) as positive psychological changes experienced due to the struggle with highly challenging circumstances, many preceding researchers (Saakvitne, 1998; Tennen & Affleck, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995) noted the phenomenon that, for some people, an encounter with trauma could lead to meaningful positive changes in the individual. Noonan and Tennstedt (1997) suggest that, when individuals experience trauma in their lives, they try to make sense of their situation and, in so doing, find meaning in their circumstances. Other pioneers who addressed the possibility of growth from an encounter with trauma include Maslow (1954), Frankl (1959), Caplan (1964), Dohrenwend (1978), and Yalom (1980). Although some initial investigators focused on this field (for example, Finkel, 1975), and some findings showed possibilities for positive outcomes in the face of adversity, the topic of growth has become of interest for research since the early 1990s due to the work of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995), who gave the term “post-traumatic growth” (PTG) to the concept in 1995. The positive psychology movement, which focuses on positive outcomes of traumatic events

and antecedents of such growth outcomes, created a framework for PTG research (Hobfoll, 2011). Below is the conceptual model of PTG by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995).

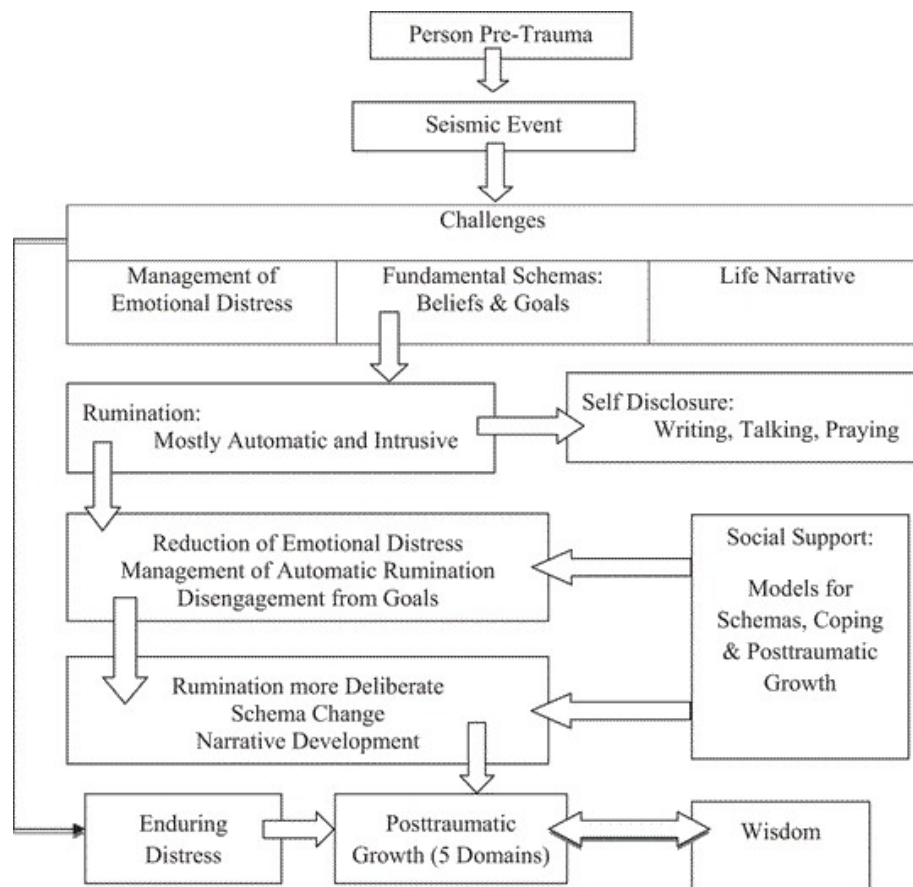


Figure 2: Conceptual model of PTG (Tedeschi& Calhoun, 1995)

Tedeschi and McNally (2011, p.19) summarise the broad model of post-traumatic growth (PTG) as follows: (a) trauma-related cognitive processing, engagement, or rumination; (b) disclosure of the traumatic events; (c) the sociocultural context in which trauma occurred and attempts to process, disclose, and resolve trauma; (d) the personal dispositions of the survivor and the degree to which he/she is resilient; and (e) the degree to which events either permit or suppress the aforementioned processes. The authors also explain how PTG may relate to wisdom, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose in life.

The model of PTG explores the development of individuals who experienced trauma and explains the process of their growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) found that growth experiences in the outcome of traumatic events statistically outnumbered the incidence of mental disorders. The authors, however, warn that the general assumption that trauma results in a psychological disorder should not be replaced with the expectation that growth is an unavoidable outcome (Tedeschi& Calhoun, 2004). Instead, studies have found that continued personal suffering and growth often coexist. Tedeschi and Calhoun, (2004), furthermore, indicate that research results have shown that individuals facing very difficult circumstances often experience significant changes in their lives that they view as positive.

Although much progress has been made since the PTG model was introduced, little is still known about the processes and consequences of the experience of growth after trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2008). The importance of ongoing research into PTG is also indicated by the work of Hobfoll (2011) and the opinion that PTG is better explained in the theoretical framework of terror management than that of positive psychology.

Domains of post-traumatic growth

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) point out that PTG manifests as perceived changes in (a) the sense of self, (b) a sense of relationship with others, and (c) changes in one's general philosophy of life. Based on empirical evidence, the Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) was developed to assess five domains of growth, namely, personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation for life, and spiritual changes, as illustrated in Figure 3 and discussed below.

Posttraumatic growth (PTG)

"It is through this process of struggling with adversity that changes may arise that propels the individual to a higher level of functioning than which existed prior to the event"

(Linley & Joseph, 2004, p. 11)

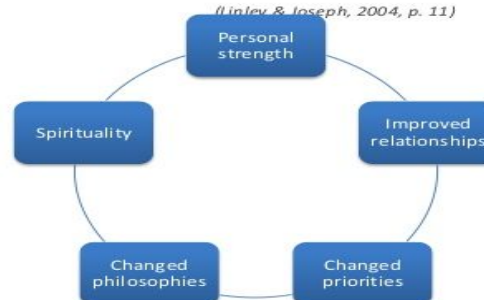


Figure 3: Five domains of post-traumatic growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004)

A greater sense of personal strength

An increased sense of personal strength is the perception of individuals who are capable of dealing with challenges and adversity after trauma. The victims feel that they have more confidence, skills, and strengths compared to what they had before the trauma occurred (Lindstrom, Cann, Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013). They report having an improved sense of self-control and emotional strength, a greater sense of perspective during times of hardship, and an increased feeling of independence. However, such a sense of personal strength is often accompanied by a sense of vulnerability and by an understanding of the negative impact of traumatic experiences on their lives (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

New possibilities

Lindstrom et al. (2013) indicate that, during the process of grappling with the trauma, the victims discover new choices for their lives in several areas. The creation of a post trauma identity or script for their lives is related to having a new life view that changes their past beliefs and core assumptions, while opening up possibilities and opportunities that did not exist before the trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004).

Deepened relationships with others

Victims of violent crime, after an encounter with the trauma, will understand traumatic disruption and devise plans in order to deal with their adversity. Therefore, they will often seek help and support from their family and friends (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). As a result of self-disclosure about their personal experiences, the victims may find a deeper connection with others as well as a feeling of closeness in interpersonal relationships (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004). Hence, the victims will be more accepting of assistance shown by others and make better use of existing social networks or begin to build in new ones (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004). The victims may reflect on relationships that truly matter and ignore those that are unhelpful (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

A greater appreciation for life and a changed sense of priorities

Victims who experience trauma have a sense of vulnerability and will come to terms with the reality that they cannot predict or control certain events (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004). The violent crime victims may begin to describe their appreciation of their own value, of life, and of each day that it presents. They no longer take life for granted and refine their sense of priority of what is important in life (Lindstrom et al., 2013).

Spiritual development

Spirituality can be an aspect of coping with trauma for victims of violent crime. As a result of individual strength felt in engaging with traumatic conditions, the victims' experiences may give rise to religious questions or to a sense of growth in religious or spiritual matters (Lindstrom et al., 2013). Religious or spiritual beliefs may increase after the adversity and also lead to growth as a coping mechanism in the cognitive process of finding meaning (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). However, even non-religious people may experience some growth in the spiritual domain, which is not exclusive to those who already have strong or religious connections (Ramos & Leal, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

The developmental process of post-traumatic growth

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2008) describe PTG as not merely a going back to normal, but rather an experience of changes that are deeply sincere. Post-traumatic growth, therefore, has a quality of transformation or a qualitative modification in functioning. Calhoun and Tedeschi (2008) suggest that PTG implies the construction of a new set of schemas that are

transforming due to trauma. These authors, however, emphasise that the growth does not occur because of trauma, but that it is the individual's grappling with the new reality in the aftermath of trauma that is essential in determining the extent to which post-traumatic growth occurs (Jarden, 2009; Malhotra & Chebiban, 2016). Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) state that the adjustment to trauma can take place through several cognitive and behavioural strategies that are used to facilitate the process of giving meaning to traumatic events, but that also bring about the development of PTG. The authors indicate that research has identified predictors of growth, with evidence pointing to the importance of stress-appraisal, coping, and personality variables. The use of spiritual- and emotional-focused coping is most likely to lead to growth, and social support is crucial to the victims of trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2008).

Ramos and Leal (2013) point out that PTG is a compound and powerful construct that arises from a development process, as suggested by the authors who coined the term (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; 2004). In this PTG developmental model, the individual's growth is understood with regard to encountering trauma and being influenced by several environmental factors and individual characteristics (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) such as those discussed below.

Factors associated with the PTG process

Distress

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) report that experiencing trauma may create negative circumstances that can possibly lead to distress, a feeling of vulnerability, unpredictability, and lack of control over aspects of life. Despite this, the victims may simultaneously experience benefits as an outcome from the struggle with the traumatic experience. Some studies have found negative relationships between distress and PTG, which means that, if violent crime victims develop strong PTG, they should be able to overcome the cognitive disruption, and their distress levels should also decrease (Cadell, Regehr & Hemsworth, 2003; Tomich & Helgeson, 2004).

Linley et al. (2008) conducted a study that confirmed that positive changes predicted fewer PTSD symptoms and a decrease in levels of depression and anxiety. However, the authors also noted that some people who perceived growth after trauma might not report a decrease in distress levels. According to recent data, these discrepancies indicate mixed and coexistent concepts (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Dekel, Ein-Dor & Solomon, 2012). Other studies have suggested that higher levels of distress (Solomon & Dekel, 2007) and PTSD symptoms (Dekel et al., 2012; also see Helgeson et al., 2006; Ramos & Leal, 2013) are associated with PTG scores.

Personality characteristics

Ramos and Leal (2013) remark that some personality characteristics may influence the development of PTG. Studies conducted by PTG researchers have suggested that the Big Five personality characteristics of extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness have a positive relation to PTG, while neuroticism appears to be negatively associated with growth (Joseph & Linley, 2008; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Based on the above-mentioned premise, Blackie, Jayawickreme, Tsukayama and Fleeson (2016) conducted a study that demonstrated the extent to which PTG was manifested in individuals' everyday lives following a recent stressful or traumatic adverse event. These authors developed a state measure of PTG, and the results showed that the factor structure of state PTG was comparable to trait PTG.

Emotional disclosure

PTG authors are of the opinion that emotional expression regarding the trauma affects cognitive processing. Therefore, when violent crime victims describe their traumatic experiences to family, friends, or counsellors and they are willing to accept other opinions, it may facilitate cognitive elaboration of the traumatic experience (Lepore, Fernandez-Berrocol, Ragan & Ramos, 2004). The study conducted by Stockton, Joseph, and Hunt (2014) examined the effects of Internet-based expressive writing on the PTG of individuals who were experiencing PTSD. The findings indicated that PTG significantly increased and that there was also cognitive processing during the expressive writing. In an analysis of the use of language, the use of insight words was associated with an increase in PTG (Stockton et al., 2014).

Coping strategies

From their study, Linley and Joseph (2004) reported that the type of coping style or strategy used after the encounter with trauma was associated with the cognitive processing that was adopted and that these, in combination, determined the level of growth experienced. The authors found that emotion-focused coping with trauma was positively associated with PTG (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

Social support

Social support has been found to influence the coping process and the successful adjustment to traumatic experience, thereby becoming a predictor for PTG (Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 1999). Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) point out that, alternatively, the perception of positive changes in several domains of violent crime victims' lives may create the opportunity to form close relationships, show more caring behaviours, and create new contacts and friendships, which, in turn, further support PTG outcomes (Ramos & Leal, 2013; Schaefer & Moos, 1998).

Idiographic characteristics

Authors of PTG have identified three idiographic factors that are associated with perceived growth: gender, age, and educational level. The studies suggest that women, younger people, and people with higher educational levels are generally more likely to report growth or benefit findings (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004).

Assumptive world

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) indicate that traumatic experience disrupts previous ways of thinking. Victims, when faced with traumatic events, have a need for engaging in cognitive processing in order to understand the overwhelming situation (Calhoun, Tedeschi, Cann & McMillan, 2000). Hence, traumatic events challenge victims' assumptive world, which is described by Janoff-Bulman (2004) as a set of basic beliefs that help individuals to understand the world, others, and the future. A major stressful event may destroy one's framework for understanding the world, leading to a cognitive restructuring of core beliefs (Joseph & Linley, 2008). Such restructuring may eventually have an overpowering effect on the reconstruction of the personal life story (Cann et al., 2010). After rebuilding the shattered cognitive framework, the victim will begin to learn new ways of perceiving his/her struggles and possibilities, which may present a pathway to the emergence of PTG and a perception of positive benefit (Cann et al., 2011; Janoff-Bulman, 2006).

The role of rumination

As stated above, highly stressful events may shatter and rebuild violent crime victims' assumptive world view and, through the process of rumination, could lead to PTG (Cobb, Tedeschi, Calhoun & Cann, 2006; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Calhoun and Tedeschi (2004) remark that rumination is a process of repetitive thought about the stressor and related issues that is intrusive. Other conceptualisations of rumination make a distinction between brooding and reflective rumination, the latter being a more deliberate, reflective process for rebuilding victims' general way of understanding the world (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Calhoun and Tedeschi, (2006) mention that the characteristics of the rumination process are necessary elements for coping with traumatic events. Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998; 2006) refer to rumination as the extent to which victims find meaning in an event, thereby noticing changes in themselves.

Some authors such as Moberly and Watkins (2008) suggest that ruminative thinking can have negative outcomes due to the fact that intrusive ruminative thoughts have been linked to negative symptoms. Cann et al. (2009) indicate that intrusive rumination tends to occur immediately after a trauma, leading to the development of PTSD, whereas deliberate rumination is more likely to occur later, leading to the development of PTG (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Phelps, Williams, Raichle, Turner & Ehde, 2008).

In the above discussion, PTG was conceptualised and described. Post-traumatic growth was also associated with other theoretical constructs that will be discussed briefly below.

Post-traumatic growth and associated constructs

Optimism

Zoellner and Maercker (2006) remark that optimism seems to be related to the PTG process. Adaptive coping, positive understanding of threatening situations, expression of positive feelings, and seeking social support are characteristics that often characterise an optimistic person and that may facilitate the perception of positive change following trauma (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009).

Resilience

Agaibi and Wilson (2005) refer to resilience as an ability to adapt and cope successfully despite threatening or challenging situations, as is illustrated in Figure 4 below. Vieselmeyer, Holguin, and Mezulis (2017) investigated the role of resilience and gratitude in relation to trauma exposures and post-traumatic growth following the campus shooting at Seattle Pacific University. The purpose of their study was to understand aspects of trauma and defensive features that contributed to PTG. Vieselmeyer et al. (2017) found that a significant number of individuals reported resilience as well as positive changes such as enhanced appreciation for life and suggested that some people were able to convert adverse experiences, through resilience, into personal growth.

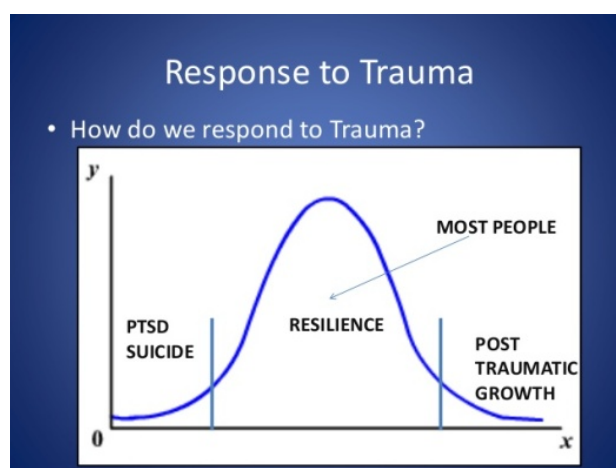


Figure 4: Resilience and post-traumatic growth (Rendon, 2015)

Lepore and Revenson (2006) view PTG as an outcome of a configuration process in which PTG is distinguished from resilience, as it is related only to positive changes and not both the negative and positive outcomes. According to Tedeschi and McNally (2011), resilience is the ability to resist or to recover from adversity, but they argue that returning to baseline functioning is not the only positive outcome after exposure to trauma. Collier (2016)

is of the opinion that crime victims who are already resilient when trauma occurs may experience less PTG because their coping mechanisms are often not affected by traumatic events. However, a smaller degree of resilience in victims who experience trauma and whose coping mechanisms are affected by the trauma would mean that they will most likely experience more PTG. Such individuals will try to conceptualise their traumatic experiences and what these mean for their world view and will eventually find a sense of personal growth (Collier, 2016).

Hope

Hope is viewed as a context-specific human characteristic, where hope is the ability to think of multiple ways (pathways) to reach a goal as well as the motivation (agency) to use the pathways identified (Snyder, 2002). This model of hope is shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Snyder's hope model (Snyder, 2002)

Hope can contribute to growth when victims of crime are experiencing trauma, as was found by Cabral (2010), who examined PTG among survivors of interpersonal violence, the relationship between PTG and the severity of the psychological symptoms, as well as growth and hope. Hope was found to positively predict growth. In supporting the relationship between PTG and hope, a study investigating the role of hope and perceived social support in predicting post-traumatic growth among half-widows in Kashmir found that high hope scores were indicative of growth in these women (Anjum & Maqbool, 2017).

Meaning in life

Meaning in life (MIL) has been described as the extent to which victims comprehend and see significance in their lives as well as their perceiving themselves as having a purpose in life (Steger, 2012). A study conducted by Damasio and Koller (2015) indicated that MIL played an important role in human functioning and that meaning in life was positively associated with psychological well-being and quality of life. Rendon (2015a) points out that post-traumatic growth can manifest itself in many distinct ways, among others, that victims who

have experienced trauma may feel that their lives have more meaning, that they are closer to their loved ones, and that they have a life journey of new possibilities. Correspondingly, Gorman (2001) found that trauma victims reported that their lives had more meaning after than before they had experienced the trauma and that meaning making was generally important for growth after the trauma. A study that was conducted on students investigated the relationship between meaning in life and hope as projections of post-traumatic growth (De Klerk, 2017). The results showed that the participants who indicated a high amount of both meaning in life and hope significantly reported post-traumatic growth. The researcher does, however, mention that further enquiry is needed to effectively understand the factors that have an impact on the relationship between these constructs (De Klerk, 2017).

Gratitude

Emmons and Crumpler (2000) conceptualised gratitude as an emotion, a virtue, a moral sentiment, a motive, a coping response, a skill, and an attitude, displayed as an emotional response to a gift, or the appreciation felt after one had been the beneficiary of an altruistic act. Ruini and Vescovelli (2013) examined the role of gratitude in a breast cancer sample and its associations with post-traumatic growth, psychological well-being, and distress in order to compare patients reporting higher levels of gratitude to those reporting lower levels of gratitude. The results revealed that gratitude was significantly and positively correlated with all aspects of post-traumatic growth, to reduced distress, and to increased positive emotions, but surprisingly not to psychological well-being. However, Greene and McGovern (2017) investigated the gratitude of adults who had experienced early parental death and found that current dispositional gratitude was positively correlated with psychological well-being and with post-traumatic growth and negatively correlated with depression. The authors also relate gratitude to a new-found belief that life is precious and to greater appreciation of loved ones.

Signature strengths

Signature strengths are those character strengths that are most essential to individuals' functioning and well-being. In a retrospective Web-based study of 1739 adults, Peterson et al. (2008) found small, but positive, associations among potentially traumatic events experienced and cognitive and interpersonal character strengths. The authors concluded that growth following trauma could entail strengthening of character. In South African research involving successfully reintegrating ex-offenders, Guse and Hudson (2014) found that the PTG of these men was related to the strengths of hope, gratitude, and spirituality.

Positive emotions

Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) believe that positive emotions are important for survival. According to the theory illustrated in Figure 6 below, positive emotions expand cognition and behavioural tendencies.

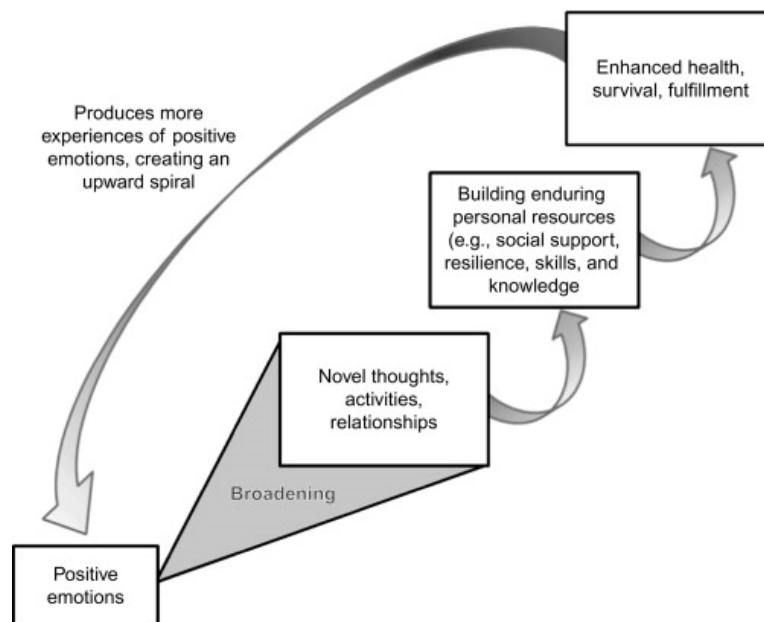


Figure 6: Broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008)

Positive emotions allow individuals to be more open to new ideas and new ways of thinking. Therefore, positive thinking improves creativity and problem-solving (Fredrickson, 1998). Ong, Bergeman and Wallace (2006) found that experiencing positive emotions might encourage trauma victims to make psychologically healthier decisions that would contribute to their growth. Ong et al., (2006) report that experiencing positive emotions helps to modify individuals' reaction to trauma and allows victims to recover from the negative effects of stress more quickly and to eventually experience growth. The authors, furthermore, state that the psychological benefit of positive emotions is the reduction of stress and a boost to general psychological well-being. Tugade, Fredrickson, and Barrett (2004) postulate that positive emotions can act as a buffer between individuals and their experienced trauma and allow them to cope more effectively and preserve their mental health, which will enable PTG. In addition and similarly to Ong et al. (2006), Kiken, Lundberg, and Fredrickson (2017) point out that victims being mindful and taking time to savour positive emotions can provide an extra buffer against the symptoms of PTSD, while boosting psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and growth. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) indicate that coping constructs that victims may employ as their coping mechanism after trauma are positive emotions and resilience. The authors found that resilience was significantly associated with emotional adjustment, suggesting that the experience of positive emotions (management of negative

emotions) helped the victims to handle the adverse event better and that the outcome would probably be post-traumatic growth (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Coping

Coping encompasses the cognitive and behavioural responses to difficult situations. Coping includes direct efforts to solve the problem, attempts to manage victims' emotions, and attempts to manage social relations in times of stress (Stephenson & DeLongis, 2016). Coping is based on the Lazarus and Folkman (1984) model, as shown in Figure 7 below, and refers to the behavioural and cognitive efforts people use to manage the internal and external demands of a stressful situation. Furthermore, Thabet (2017) mentions that social support is considered a means of coping and a resource towards growth after trauma. Coping represents meaningful behavioural, cognitive, and emotional steps taken in order to eliminate or reduce stressors and/or the psychological distress (Boxer, Sloan-Power, Marcado & Schappell, 2012). Green and Diaz (2007) identified predictors of emotional stress within 30 days of the crime event and the coping strategy of individuals who had experienced trauma. They found that gender and type of crime experienced significantly predicted the coping strategies and psychological well-being of individuals who had experienced trauma (Green & Diaz, 2007).

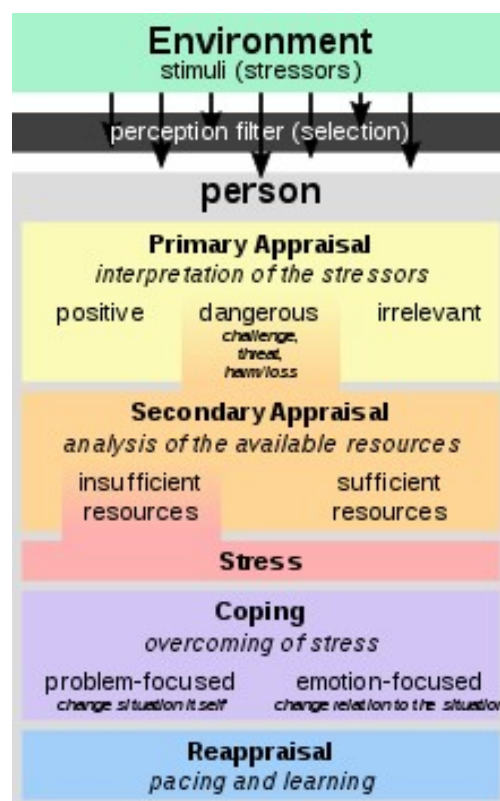


Figure 7: Transactional coping model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Wild and Paivio (2004) investigated factors responsible for reported benefits of traumatic experiences or post-traumatic growth in college students. Specifically, they studied

dimensions typically associated with traumatic recovery (that is, psychological functioning, coping, and emotion regulation). The results indicated that active coping and subjective well-being led to post-traumatic growth, but social desirability and symptoms of distress were independent of growth. Linley and Joseph (2004) found that coping style was associated with cognitive processing of the traumatic experience and predicted the level of post-traumatic growth in the victims of crime. The study conducted by Matud (2017) examined gender differences in stress and coping with trauma. The women scored significantly higher than the men on the emotional coping style and lower on the rational and detachment coping styles. The men were found to have more inhibition than women, and they used problem-solving types of coping. Furthermore, Stephenson and DeLongis (2016) indicate that individuals use different kinds of strategies in order to cope with psychological stress. Social support seeking can be used to express emotions (emotion-focused coping), to gather information (problem-focused coping), and to maintain relationships with others (relationship-focused coping).

In the above discussion, the problem statement of, and literature background to, his study were given. The research question and aims will be presented next.

Research Question and Objectives of the Study

Having reviewed the literature regarding trauma and post-traumatic growth and in the light of the problem statement, it became clear that not much research had been done in the South African context on the PTG of violent crime victims. Furthermore, Calhoun and Tedeschi (2008) call for qualitative research both into the PTG model and with the PTGI in order to further understand what PTG mechanisms and dynamics are. The research question of this study emerged as being the following: what factors that either enable or inhibit PTG in victims of violent crimes can be identified by qualitatively exploring their shared lived experiences in this regard and by evaluating their responses on the PTGI? Research aims were to:

- qualitatively, by means of interviews, identify either enabling or inhibiting factors for PTG from the shared lived experiences of victims a year or more after having experienced violent crime; and
- measure the PTG of participants with the PTGI in order to use their scores to identify those who reported PTG and those who did not and to qualitatively analyse the results. The individual scores would also be discussed with participants.

The research methods and designs will be discussed below.

In the first part of this chapter serving as literature background to this study, the post-traumatic growth construct was conceptualised along its existing theoretical frameworks and

models. Empirical findings concerning PTG and the diverse contexts in which the construct had been applied and researched were discussed, as was the association of PTG with other related constructs.

In the next section, the research undertaken to study the above-mentioned research question and aims will be explicated.

Research Methodology

This research consisted of a literature and qualitative empirical study.

Literature study

A review of the literature was aimed at contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem identified. Such a study was, furthermore, intended to demonstrate the underlying assumptions of the general questions in the field of research (Creswell, 2009; De Vos, Strydom & Fouche, 2005).

Research design

The present study used an exploratory descriptive design, in which qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted in order to gather data to answer the research question. According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative study is an assumption, a world view, and the possible use of a theoretical lens in the study of the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The researcher is a key instrument in qualitative research and can use multiple sources of collecting data such as interviews, observation, and audio-visual information. The researcher in this study reviewed all the data collected by means of interviews, made sense of these, and organised them into categories or themes that cut across the data sources (De Vos et al., 2005). A qualitative research method was suitable for this study because the researcher needed to hear each participant's narrated story or shared lived experiences of criminal violence and to understand the factors that contributed to or prevented their experiencing PTG. The qualitative design provided a complex, in-depth, and detailed understanding of the problem under study (Creswell, 2007). The analysis of the data was done according to the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Researcher's paradigm

The researcher's objective was to explore and interpret the PTG experiences of the violent crime victims after the trauma and to really depend on the participants' perspectives of the incidences being studied (Creswell, 2009). She respected each participant's uniqueness regarding his/her experiences of trauma completely by giving each individual the space to discuss, in full detail, what either enabled or prevented his/her achievement of PTG. Controversial opinions among the participants were noted by the researcher, who was not

showing herself as being knowledgeable, but as someone who was ready to take a journey with them when they allowed her into their world, their realities, and the experiences that they were creating of these. In addition, the researcher encouraged the participants to narrate their stories from their own mental frameworks and to meaningfully engage in the discussion process. The personal paradigm from which the researcher approached the study was the social construction perspective, according to which truth is socially constructed within live contexts in which individuals interact as active social agents (Creswell, 2009).

Participants and procedures

The participants in this study were recruited from the Cosmo City Baptist Church in Johannesburg, South Africa. The specific area was selected because it is known for its high crime levels, and people living there have reported trauma-related incidents and experiences to the pastor and at the congregation meetings. The researcher resides in the area, but is not a member of the Cosmo City Baptist Church and, therefore, considered the particular Baptist church context as being a suitable case or “bounded system” from which data could be obtained (De Vos et al., 2005, p.272). The selection of the participants was by means of a purposive method (Creswell, 2007).

The pastor of the church was approached with the intention to do the study, and he agreed, in writing, that the research could be done with consenting members of his congregation. After approval of the study and after obtaining ethical clearance, the researcher made an appointment and requested the pastor to assist with recruitment of the victims of violent crimes who had already expressed their experienced trauma. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were succinctly explained to him. The pastor introduced possible participants to the study by announcing the study to the church congregation and by distributing the consent letters to those who requested them. He identified those who were interested, were willing to talk about their experiences, and had at least a year of distancing since the trauma and then obtained their contact numbers and the signed consent letters from them. After receipt of the consent letters, the researcher contacted willing participants, and the research process commenced.

The participants in the study were those who willingly agreed to discuss their experienced trauma and the possible growth that had flowed from it and signed the consent form of the proposed study. The interviews were done at the church premises or at another convenient location and at a convenient time, which were arranged with the participants. Before the interviews, a short presentation introducing the topic and the nature of the study was given by the researcher. It was also necessary to ascertain that the inclusion criteria had been met. All the participants were informed of their rights, had full transparency about the study, agreed that the discussions could be audio-recorded, and were given the contact

details of the researcher. At least 10 participants were involved in the study, but if necessary, more participants were available to be included until data saturation could be reached for both enabling and inhibiting factors linked to PTG. Further aspects regarding the participants are discussed under ethical considerations in the study.

Inclusion criteria were that participants:

- had reported experienced trauma due to violent crime;
- had experienced the trauma from one to two years ago;
- had English proficiency to meaningfully complete the PTGI;
- were willing to engage in a discussion of PTG related to their traumatic experiences and agreed that the discussion could be audio-recorded;
- could communicate in an African language in which the researcher was proficient; and
- did not know the researcher.

Exclusion criteria were that participants:

- had no experience of trauma due to violent crime;
- had experienced trauma more recently than one year ago;
- had inadequate English proficiency;
- were unwilling to discuss their trauma-related PTG;
- could not communicate in an African language familiar to the researcher; and
- knew the researcher personally.

Data collection

A *short biographical questionnaire* was used to obtain descriptive information from participants. Gender, age, culture, language, and level of education questions were posed. Most of the church member-participants understood English and at least one African language in which the researcher could converse.

Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996)

The PTGI was given to the participants to measure their levels of PTG, and the researcher assisted, where necessary. The PTGI was used as a source of information, not as a data-gathering instrument for statistical analysis purposes. The participants' levels of PTG as indicated by the PTGI scores contributed to analysis and interpretation of other data qualitatively obtained. Participants received full feedback about their scores on the PTGI.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) developed the PTGI as an instrument for assessing positive outcomes reported by persons who had experienced traumatic events. It is a 21-item scale, including factors of New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength,

Spiritual Change, and Appreciation for Life. The PTGI has well-established validity and reliability, and its ability to capture the multidimensional quality of personal growth has been documented by the authors. The PTGI demonstrated good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 in the study by Tedeschi and Calhoun. Respondents answer the 21-item measure on a five-point Likert scale (0 = no change; 5 = great degree of change). The PTGI was used in South African research by Walker-Williams (2012), who found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 with traumatised women. The PTGI is modestly related to optimism and extraversion, and the scale appears to have utility in determining how successful individuals coping with the aftermath of trauma are in constructing or strengthening their perceptions of themselves, others, and the meaning of events (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006).

In-depth individual interviews

In-depth interviews were the primary means of collecting data from the participants, lasting about 60 to 90 minutes. The present study used a qualitative in-depth interview format in order to get an informed perspective on the research question related to the post-traumatic growth of victims of violent crime (Jugder, 2016). Qualitative interviews give insight into a social phenomenon, as they allow the respondents to reflect and reason on the subject in different ways (Folkestadt, 2008). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) state that such interviews are preferable, since they allow participants to speak freely and in their own way about their experiences with the phenomenon of PTG.

During the interviews, the researcher introduced herself and used responses such as active listening, minimal encouragement, and emotional support throughout. She made sure that the participants had adequate freedom to convey their views and their experiences without the researcher's view being imposed on them. (For example, the participants were encouraged to give their own understanding of post-traumatic growth.) Probes were used to obtain more in-depth and complete information or to clarify a response. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked each interviewee whether he/she wanted to add anything else, how he/she had experienced the interview process, and whether he/she was emotionally and otherwise well after exploring the topic (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). If any person indicated discomfort, he/she was comforted and offered a follow-up counselling discussion with a trauma counsellor, who was willing to perform this service free of charge. The researcher arranged such contact. The in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in English, and there were three participants who indicated a need to use Setswana.

The participants were asked the following questions during the interview:

- Tell me, in your own words, what growth after trauma means to you.

- Please describe how your struggle with the trauma that you experienced may have led to post-traumatic growth in yourself.
- Please describe aspects in your coping with what has happened that made growth difficult.
- What aspects would you say have strongly enabled you to have PTG, **or** what would you say has really hindered your having PTG?

In order to minimise the bias that the religious setting might have, probing was done for other factors concerning PTG, especially in shared experiences in which religious features were prominent.

After the interviews participants were given a break and some refreshments. The PTGI was then introduced to them as a measure to complement the understanding of their PTG. Thereafter the researcher scored it and in a short discussion gave individual feedback. The PTGI was positively experienced by all participants.

Since the in-depth interviews were the primary technique of data collection, it was important to be mindful of the nature of the analysis that would be conducted (Jugder, 2016).

Data analysis

The method of analysis chosen for the study was a qualitative approach to thematic content analysis, generally the most widely used qualitative method to analyse transcribed interviews. The theoretical framework for thematic content analysis of the data was that of Braun and Clarke (2006); also see Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017). According to the authors, thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The reason the researcher chose this method was that a rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions. In addition, this approach facilitates an investigation of the interview data from two perspectives: firstly, from the data-driven perspective and a perspective on coding in an inductive way; secondly, from the research question perspective to check whether the data are consistent with the research questions and provide sufficient information (Jugder, 2016).

The next important consideration was identifying themes emerging from the interview data. What counts as a theme is something that captures the key ideas from the data in relation to the research question and that represents some patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke, (2006) indicate that the main requirement is to be consistent throughout the process of determining the themes. Bazeley (2009) claims that themes only attain significance when they are linked to form a coordinated picture or an explanatory model of describing, comparing, and relating, which is a simple

three-step formula when reporting the results. Braun and Clarke (2006) also explain that themes or patterns within data can be identified either in an inductive bottom-up (see Frith & Gleeson, 2004) or in a theoretical, deductive top-down way (see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). This study made use of the data-driven perspective or the inductive bottom-up approach.

Six phases of thematic analysis

The data was collected through recorded (with permission of the interviewees) in-depth interviews with victims of violent crime from Cosmo City Baptist Church. After that, the data were prepared for analysis by transcribing the recordings into written texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher followed the six phases of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the transcription of the interviews by reading (and rereading) the transcriptions and listening to the recordings. A note was made of initial ideas. This follows the suggestion made by Braun and Clarke (2006) that it is important for the researcher to have a comprehensive understanding of the content of the interactions and to have familiarised herself with all the aspects of the data.

Secondly, once familiar with the data, the researcher started identifying preliminary codes, which are the features of the data that appear interesting and meaningful. These codes are more numerous and specific than themes, but provide an interaction with the context of the captured conversations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third step in the process was the start of the interpretive analysis of the collated codes. Relevant data extracts were sorted (combined or split) into themes. The researcher's thought process alluded to the relationship between codes, sub-themes, and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fourth step was the refinement of the themes. A deeper review of identified themes followed, where the researcher needed to question whether to combine, refine, separate, or discard initial themes. The data within themes were connected meaningfully, while there were also clear distinctions between themes. That was done over two phases, where the themes needed to be checked in relation to the coded extracts (Phase 1) and then overall for the data set (Phase 2). A thematic map can be generated from this step (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Defining and naming the themes was the fifth step of the analysis, where the researcher refined and defined the themes and potential sub-themes from the data. Ongoing

analysis was required to further enhance the identified themes. The researcher needed to name the themes and give a clear working definition that captured the essence of each theme in a concise manner. At this point, a unified story of the data emerged from the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The last step was producing a report where the researcher transformed her analysis into a coherent narrative about the topic by means of vivid and compelling example extracts that related to the themes, to the research question, and to the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The advantage of thematic content analysis is that it is relatively easy to conduct on a qualitative data set, even when one is a novice researcher. Yet, despite thematic analysis being a flexible method, the researcher needs to understand it very well (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the thematic content analysis, the data was given to the co-coder for quality checking. Firstly, the co-coder checked whether the thematic content analysis had been conducted according to the topic, objectives, and question of the study. Secondly, she checked whether thematic content analysis had been done according to the steps given by Braun and Clarke (2006). Lastly, the co-coder assisted the researcher by giving a detailed report of suggestions in order to make changes in her thematic content analysis.

Trustworthiness

Graneheim and Lundman (2003) indicate that the research findings should be as **trustworthy** as possible and that, to achieve this, every study must be evaluated in relation to the procedures used to generate findings. Creswell (2009) makes recommendations for the assessment of the researcher's trustworthiness. For example, the interviews of the present study that were conducted with the participants were transcribed, and no changes were made. Hence, the transcriptions were written according to the participants' world view, analysed, and sent to the promoter and the co-coder for verification and for purposes of trustworthiness. The researcher had a debriefing session with each participant to make sure that his/her story was captured exactly as it was related to the findings and also to make sure that the participant was well after the discussions, as trauma is a sensitive topic. The study used interviews to collect the data, keeping in mind Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit's (2009) view that interviews are important because they give an account of individuals' perspectives based on their world view in a trustworthy manner.

The eight criteria for qualitative research as outlined by Tracy (2010) were used for assessing the trustworthiness of the study, namely, a worthy topic, rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. These

criteria and how they were achieved by the research practices in the study are briefly discussed below.

Post-traumatic growth of violent crime victims is regarded as a **worthy topic** due to the following rationale: according to Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006), scientific evidence has shown that individuals facing very difficult circumstances often experience significant changes in their lives that they view as positive. Therefore, the study explored what the factors were that either enabled or inhibited the victims of violent crime towards achieving growth. This kind of study could empower participants with knowledge regarding their psychological frame of mind following their trauma (Tracy, 2010).

Aspects of **rigour** (Tracy, 2010) were indicated by a connection between the literature review of the study and its findings or results. The sample size of the study was appropriate, and data were obtained by interviewing 11 participants. The appropriate procedures were followed when recruiting the participants and collecting data from them. Thematic analysis was chosen for data analysis, since a rigorous thematic approach produced an insightful analysis of data that answered the question of the study. The nature of the study was sensitive, and care was taken to ensure the participants' well-being, while appropriate referral structures were made available.

Sincerity was upheld by the researcher reflecting on personal values and beliefs in the writing of the research report, by recognising biases and taking steps to counter these, by presenting the research procedures and limitations in a transparent manner, and by giving credit to authors who were cited (Tracy, 2010).

Credibility was demonstrated through using various participants' perspectives as meaningful quotations, which gave their narratives rich credibility (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). A debriefing session was arranged with the violent crime victims, considering the highly sensitive nature of the topic under study; this also gave the participants a chance to ask questions or to share how they had experienced the research discussions. Furthermore, it served as member checking to ascertain whether the results obtained from the data were accurate and truthful.

Resonance was achieved by presenting the data in a well-coordinated, satisfactory, and interesting way in line with the research objectives (Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, the study gave theoretic resonance by supporting and contributing to disciplinary knowledge and heuristic resonance by making suggestions that could be explored and studied further (Abbott, 2004).

Ethics were a significant part of the research process and contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Tracy, 2010). For example, participants were informed regarding their rights to

participate voluntarily, confidentiality was upheld at all times, and the vulnerabilities to secondary trauma of the participants were noted, acknowledged, and treated with care.

Meaningful **coherence** was achieved in that the objectives of the study were reached, proper methods were applied, proper procedures were followed, the literature was studied and integrated with the themes identified, and interpretations were made (Tracy, 2010).

Transferability is some kind of external validity, and it is an evaluation of whether the phenomenon or results reported in one research study are relevant or applicable to proposition, action, and future research, that is, the transferability of the research findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moon et al., 2016). Reported outcomes that are transferable can be crucial to the application of research findings. Thus, it is critical that researchers distinctly express the level to which findings may or may not be relevant to other contexts (Moon et al., 2016). The results acquired from a qualitative study are for the interpretation of the specific objectives of the study, rather than for creating a desired result for generalisation (Creswell, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher was mindful of research participants' rights, took into consideration participants' needs, and treated them with respect and dignity at all times. In South Africa, there are diverse cultures, and a researcher should attempt to understand the participants' views based on their culture. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) (2008) states that a researcher in the field of psychology shall develop, maintain, and encourage high standards of professional competence and ensure that research participants are protected from professional practices that fall short of international and best practice standards (HPCSA, 2008). Similarly, Allen (2011) mentions four general principles for ethical research, which are respect for the dignity and rights of people (beneficence), justice (veracity), autonomy (fidelity), and non-maleficence (responsibility).

Beneficence and non-maleficence

The researcher of the present study ensured that participants were not exposed to harm caused by the research process. The researcher obtained written informed consent from the participants, and the language used was understandable to each participant. She avoided conflict of interest and refrained from assuming a professional role that could (a) impair her objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing her functions as a researcher or (b) expose the participants to harm or exploitation (Allen, 2011). The researcher worked cooperatively with other professionals; for instance, if the need arose, the researcher offered to refer the participants who were not coping with trauma to a relevant professional for help. This particular counsellor had also expressed his availability for an urgent session if a participant needed such an intervention.

The researcher gave the participants breaks in the research session, when necessary, and made sure that the participants were comfortable at all times. The room was private, well ventilated, and free from distractions. The vulnerability to secondary trauma of the research participants was noted, acknowledged, and treated with care. In the unlikely event of a participant, during the discussion of his/her experience, showing that he/she was not as emotionally contained as he/she thought, the researcher used her counselling experience and skills to support and contain the person and to steer the interview to a calm conclusion. If so preferred by the participant, an urgent session was arranged with the available counsellor. Such an interview might have had to be discarded as part of the data collection; however, no interview was abruptly terminated and the person turned away due to unexpected emotional discomfort.

Respect and dignity

The researcher treated all participants fairly without any favouritism or discrimination. The researcher addressed participants by their preferred names. The participants were allowed to ask questions when unsure or when they had doubts about something, and explanations and clarifications were given. Confidentiality was upheld at all times. The researcher respected the participants' cultural background, and she honoured the value that the participants placed in this. The researcher recognised that she was potentially in a position of power over the participants, but she acknowledged that they were the owners of their own experiences and that they were the experts about the phenomenon under discussion. She treated participants politely, with consideration, and supported them throughout the exploration of their experiences.

The researcher created, maintained, stored, disseminated, and retained records and data relating to her scientific work, in line with the ethics policy of the NWU and to allow for replication of research design and analysis, if required (Research Ethics Policy –NWU, 2018).

Autonomy

Participants were given the opportunity to participate voluntarily in the study or withdraw without any consequences. They were allowed to make their own decisions without the researcher's influence. The research results could be shared with the participants after completion by means of personal feedback if they so desired, and they received full descriptive feedback on their scores on the PTGI. Research participants were free to voice their opinion about the study, if it was necessary, to the supervisor of the study.

From the above, it is clear that all principles to ensure ethical research were adhered to.

Chapter Layout

Chapter 1: Literature overview and methodology

Chapter 2: Research report as a manuscript: Post-traumatic growth of violent crime victims
in a high crime area in South Africa

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

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CHAPTER 2

THE MANUSCRIPT: ENABLING AND IMPEDING FACTORS IN THE POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH OF VIOLENT CRIME VICTIMS

Keywords: post-traumatic growth, post-traumatic stress, South Africa, trauma, victims,
violent crime,

Abstract

This study examined the post-traumatic growth (PTG) of victims of violent crime. Its aims were to qualitatively explore the PTG of participants through interviews that were analysed thematically and to quantitatively measure the PTG of participants by means of the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI). The scores of participants were qualitatively interpreted. Qualitative thematic analysis of the content of interviews identified that participants reported PTG in relationships with others, appreciation for life, personal strengths, spirituality, and the ability to find new possibilities. Scores on the PTGI showed a more positive picture of PTG than what was shared in the interviews. Participants also shared factors that impeded or hindered their achievement of PTG in the areas of relations with others, appreciation for life, personal strength, and the finding of new possibilities. Spirituality had no hindering aspects. Findings were discussed and related to relevant literature, and limitations of the study were indicated, together with recommendations for future research.

This study aimed to qualitatively study the post-traumatic growth (PTG) of victims of violent crimes by exploring possible factors that could have contributed to their growth and factors that could have prevented them from achieving PTG. The study did not ignore any of the negative experiences of trauma that might still be prevalent.

Violent crimes are a major cause of physical, social, and psychological trauma to South African citizens, especially in the big cities such as Johannesburg, and are of concern to the government, police, communities, and health professionals. Many people have experienced traumatic events due to being either witnesses or victims of violent crimes (Jooste & Maritz, 2014). Thus, the question arises whether these individuals will be able to grow from their adversity or whether they will become emotionally stuck as a result of their traumatic experiences. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), there is a long tradition in the mental health sciences, dating as far back as World War I, of studying the responses of people who have faced traumatic circumstances and of devising ways to restore them to psychological health. The main finding emerging from Tedeschi and Calhoun's work on post-traumatic growth showed that many of the persons who had struggled with trauma eventually reported changes that they regarded as positive (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006).

This research was motivated, firstly, by the researcher's concern about the number of reported crime-related traumatic incidents experienced by people in her community and whether or not these individuals would experience post-traumatic recovery or growth. Secondly, the researcher is a former psychiatric nurse, and she is presently a registered psychological counsellor, who has counselled some traumatised clients and has seen how their lives and families were affected by the violent crimes they had experienced. She has, however, often wondered what enables some people to recover from their adversities and what enables them towards growth, while others do not overcome the trauma that befell them.

The study was based on positive psychology as a theoretical framework. Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life worth living; it is the study of human flourishing, an applied approach to optimal functioning; it is also the positive science and practice concerned with people's strengths, which enable them to cope with life optimally; furthermore, it is not interested in repairing the worst in people, but rather in making the lives of people fulfilling and healthy (Peterson, 2008). Positive psychology is a field of study that aims at accentuating and enhancing positive emotions, positive experiences, positive character, and positive institutions (Hogan & Peterson, 2007). Despite its focus on the overall well-being of people, positive psychology does not deny or negate negative feelings, experiences, or circumstances in people's lives (Hogan & Peterson, 2007).

Since post-traumatic growth (PTG) is a construct in the positive psychology scientific framework and since positive psychology research has rarely studied victims of violent crime, except for the 9/11 cases (Peterson & Seligman, 2003), the broad research question of this qualitative study was as follows: would post-traumatic growth (PTG) be experienced by victims of violent crimes in South Africa, and what factors would either enable them to experience, or hinder such victims from experiencing, PTG?

Literature Framework for the Study

The study aimed to qualitatively explore the post-traumatic growth of victims of violent crimes. The concepts of violent crime, trauma, and post-traumatic growth will be discussed below.

Violent crime affects most people in South Africa, and individuals live in fear of becoming victims of such crimes. Fear of crime (FoC) research has indeed linked the phenomenon of fear of crime to the development of psychological trauma. Eagle (2015) indicates that one of the sub-clinical features among urban people is a high level of fear of crime (FoC), a construct that is usually studied by sociologists and criminologists, but that has raised much interest in psychologists more recently (Jackson, 2004). Studies assessing fear of crime have indicated an overall increase in anxiety levels of urban people over several years and have found a link between the perception of crime and feelings associated with exposure to actual psychological trauma (Jackson, 2004).

Apart from living in fear, trauma and even fear-related trauma place excessive demands on people's existing coping strategies and create disruption of many aspects of their psychological functioning. Emotional psychological trauma is believed to be the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter victims' sense of security, making them feel helpless and vulnerable in a non-dangerous situation (Schon, Gower & Kotzer, 2005). Hamby and Grych (2013) point out the connected and overlapping nature of different forms of violence and found that exposure to anyone of the different types of violent crimes had similar outcomes.

Statistics in South Africa on violent crimes show that the various incidences are increasing at an alarming rate, as reported by the 2015/16 crime factsheet statistics. The factsheet statistics show the following incidences: murder and attempted murder, 18673; sexual assault, 51895; assault, 165958; robbery, 54110; house burglary, 250606; and car and motorcycle theft, 53809 (http://www.factsheet-southafrica'2015/16_crime_statistics). These statistics have raised widespread concern about the effects of violent crimes on the lives of individuals and families. The list of reported studies on violent crime is endless, and from the facts mentioned, it is evident that violent crime is one of the major factors that may affect people's psychological health and well-being in South Africa. Research on the effects

of violent crime on human functioning has mostly focused on the negative outcomes that flow from such experiences. However, many people exposed to violent crime exhibit the ability to recover and grow towards healthy functioning (Grych, Hamby & Banyard, 2015).

Trauma and traumatic effects

According to Van der Kolk (2014), the basic internal protective mechanism in experiencing danger is called the fight-or-flight reaction. Whenever individuals perceive that they are in danger, their bodies have a massive response that affects all the organ systems. This change in every area of basic function is so dramatic that, in many ways, they are not the same people when they are terrified as when they are calm. Each episode of danger establishes a link to every previous episode of danger in their minds; so the more danger they are exposed to, the more sensitive they are to danger. With each experience of fight-or-flight, their minds form a network of connections that is triggered by every new threatening experience (Hamby & Grych, 2013).

Bloom (1999) states that psychological trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming, intense emotional blow or series of blows assaults the person from outside, and Terr (1990) states that traumatic events are external, but quickly become internalised in the mind. Van der Kolk (1989) makes a similar point that traumatisation occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threat. All the authors emphasise that it is not the trauma itself that causes lasting damage, but how the individual's mind and body react in their own unique way to traumatic experience, in combination with the unique response of the individual's social group (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004).

With regard to the effects of trauma, Van der Kolk (2014) argues that individuals cannot think clearly when under severe stress and do not take time to process information and make informed decisions; as a result, their decisions are inflexible, oversimplified, directed towards action, and often poorly constructed. Bloom and Farragher (2011) report that when people are overwhelmed by fear, they lose some capacity for speech and the capacity to put words to their experiences. The authors, furthermore, remark that, without words, the mind shifts to a mode of thinking and of processing information that might be adequate under conditions of danger, but the powerful images, feelings, and sensations do not go away, since they are deeply imprinted in the individuals' memories (Bloom & Farragher, 2011). Furthermore, Bloom (1999) mentions that people who are traumatised display symptoms of avoidance. Such individuals will avoid situations that remind them of their trauma and will experience intrusion in the form of flashbacks and nightmares, two of the interacting and escalating aspects of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Schiraldi (2009) observes that dissociation may occur as a defence against extremely distressful and painful experiences, while Bloom (1999, also see Du Plessis & Visser, 2018)

describes dissociation as a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception of the environment, adding that trauma can result in dissociation due to its overwhelming experiences. Individuals who experience trauma could split off from their feelings about the experiences and experience emotional numbing. More commonly, people who experience trauma cut off or diminish specific emotional responses because of the danger such emotions may present to continued functioning. Bloom (1999, also see Shalev, Leberzon & Marmar, 2017) emphasises that people's emotions are intimately connected to expressions of emotion through facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures, so that they show what they are consciously trying to hide. Emotional expression is influenced by values, norms, and cultures. Sigveland, Ruud, and Hauff (2017) state that emotions are innate parts of people's evolutionary, biological heritage and cannot be removed, only transmuted. The authors also indicate that unexpressed emotions can be detrimental to one's mental and physical health. Emotional dissociation makes people feel empty and meaningless and may lead to increased detachment, alienation, and even suicide because the coping skills that are useful for survival under conditions of traumatic stress are blunted (Du Plessis & Visser, 2018).

The victims of violent crimes may experience some or all of these symptoms of trauma dominating their lives, and they may feel more and more alienated from everything that gives their lives meaning such as other people, a sense of direction, a sense of spirituality, and a sense of community (Linley & Joseph, 2004). The word "trauma" is derived from the Greek word meaning "wound", and victims of violent crime may associate the perception of this woundedness with pain, shock, disillusionment, and other life-altering experiences (Swart, 2013). According to Bicknell-Hentges and Lynch (2009), counsellors and practitioners working with trauma need to understand the emotional/behavioural signs and symptoms of trauma as well as the impact of psychological trauma within the body. Trauma is a bio-psychosocial and spiritual response to a terrible event. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical, while the longer-term reaction may cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Lancaster et al., 2016).

Among those who study trauma, there has been a paradigm shift in recent years from investigating post-trauma pathology to researching positive psychological change resulting from a struggle with traumatic experiences that may occur in a variety of populations. The conviction that individuals can experience positive effects following highly stressful events is conceptualised by means of a number of themes, for example, benefit finding, post-traumatic growth, and stress-related growth (Park & Helgeson, 2006). Post-traumatic growth assumes that there can be personal gain in human suffering, in line with the fact that finding something positive in human suffering has been the intent of many religions and cultures over millennia (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). This study shares the assumption that people

can cope with, and show resilience in, the aftermath of trauma and can eventually experience post-traumatic growth flowing from their engagement with the trauma-related processes.

Post-traumatic growth (PTG)

Although the term “post-traumatic growth” was introduced by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) as positive psychological changes experienced due to the struggle with highly challenging circumstances, many preceding researchers (Saakvitne, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Tennen & Affleck, 1998) noted the phenomenon that, for some people, an encounter with trauma could lead to meaningful positive changes in the individual. Noonan and Tennstedt (1997) suggest that, when individuals experience trauma in their lives, they try to make sense of their situation and, in so doing, find meaning in their circumstances. Other pioneers who addressed the possibility of growth from an encounter with trauma include Maslow (1954), Frankl (1959), Caplan (1964), Dohrenwend (1978), and Yalom (1980). Although some initial investigators focused on this field (for example, Finkel, 1975), and some findings showed possibilities for positive outcomes in the face of adversity, the topic of growth has become of interest for research since the early 1990s due to the work of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995), who gave the term “post-traumatic growth” (PTG) to the concept in 1995. The positive psychology movement, which focuses on positive outcomes of life events and the antecedents of such outcomes, subsequently created a broad framework for PTG theory and research (Hobfoll, 2011).

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) point out that PTG comes from deriving meaning from highly stressful experiences and manifests as perceived changes in the sense of self, a sense of relationship with others, and changes in one’s general philosophy of life. Based on empirical evidence, the Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) was developed to assess five domains of growth, namely, personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation for life, and spirituality.

Tedeschi and McNally (2011, p.19) summarise the broad model of post-traumatic growth (PTG) as follows: trauma-related cognitive processing, engagement, or rumination; disclosure of the traumatic events, the sociocultural context in which trauma occurred; attempts to process, disclose, and resolve trauma; the personal dispositions of the survivor; the degree to which he/she is resilient; and the degree to which events either permit or suppress the afore-mentioned processes. The model addresses how PTG may relate to wisdom, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose in life.

Table 1: Positive changes viewed as post-traumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006)

<p>Changes in perception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An increased feeling of personal strength, confidence, and self-reliance• Greater appreciation of the fragility of life, including one's own• A perception of oneself as a survivor rather than a victim <p>Changes in relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Closer ties to close family• Greater emotional disclosure and feeling of closeness to others afterwards• More compassion for others and more willingness to give to others <p>Changes in life priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased clarity in life• A deeper and often spiritual sense of meaning in life• A new commitment to take life easy• Being less concerned with acquiring material possessions, money, and social status

Research on PTG explores the development of individuals who experienced trauma and explains the process of their growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) found that growth experiences in the aftermath of traumatic events statistically outnumbered the incidence of mental disorders. The authors, however, warn that the widespread assumption that trauma results in a psychological disorder should not be replaced with the expectation that growth is an inevitable outcome. Instead, studies have found that continuing personal distress and growth often coexist (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Although much progress has been made recently, little is still known about the processes and consequences of the experience of growth after trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2008). The importance of ongoing research into PTG is also indicated by the work of Hobfoll (2011) and by opinions that PTG is better explained in the theoretical framework of terror management than that of positive psychology and of meaning and benefit finding.

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2008) emphasise that PTG is not simply a return to normal, but an experience of changes that are deeply sincere. Post-traumatic growth, therefore, has a quality of transformation or a qualitative change in functioning. Calhoun and Tedeschi suggest that PTG implies the establishment of a new set of schemas that are changed due to the trauma. These authors, however, emphasise that the growth does not occur as a result of trauma, but that it is the individual's struggle with the new reality in the aftermath of

trauma that is crucial in determining the extent to which post-traumatic growth occurs (Jarden, 2009; also see Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016). Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) state that the adjustment to trauma can take place through several cognitive and behavioural strategies that are used to facilitate the process of giving meaning to traumatic events, but that also lead to the development of PTG. The authors indicate that research has identified predictors of post-traumatic growth, with evidence pointing to the importance of stress-appraisal, coping, and personality variables. The use of spiritual- and emotional-focused coping is most likely to lead to post-traumatic growth, and social support is a crucial mechanism for the victims of trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006).

Research Question and Objectives of the Study

Having reviewed the literature regarding violent crime in South Africa and regarding trauma and post-traumatic growth, it became clear that not much research into those areas had been done in the South African context. Furthermore, Calhoun and Tedeschi (2008) call for qualitative research both into the PTG model and the PTGI in order to develop a deep understanding of what PTG mechanisms and dynamics are. The research question of the study, thus, emerged as being the following: what factors that either enable or impede PTG in victims of violent crimes can be identified by qualitatively exploring their shared lived experiences in this regard and by evaluating their responses on the PTGI?

One research aim was to qualitatively identify either enabling or inhibiting factors for PTG from discussions with victims of their shared lived experiences after having experienced violent crime. *The other aim* was to measure the PTG of participants by means of the PTGI in order to identify and qualitatively interpret the scores obtained by them. The research methods used to reach the aims are briefly described below.

Research Methodology

The literature study

A review of the literature was aimed at contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem identified. Such a study was, furthermore, intended to demonstrate the underlying assumptions of the general questions in the field of research (De Vos, Strydom & Fouche, 2005).

Empirical study

Research design

The study used an exploratory descriptive design, in which qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted in order to gather data to answer the research question. According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative study is an assumption, a world view, and the possible use of a theoretical lens in the study of the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The researcher is a key source or instrument in qualitative research and

can use multiple sources of collecting data such as interviews, observation, and audio-visual information (De Vos et al., 2005). A qualitative design was suitable for this study because the researcher needed to hear each participant's narrated story or shared lived experiences of violent crime and understand the factors that contributed to or prevented their experiencing PTG. The qualitative design provided a complex, in-depth, and detailed understanding of the problem under study (Creswell, 2007). The analysis of the data was done according to the thematic content analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Participants and procedures

The participants in this study were recruited from the Cosmo City Baptist Church in Johannesburg, South Africa. The specific area was selected because it is known for its high crime levels, and people living there have reported trauma-related incidents and experiences to the pastor and at the congregation meetings. The researcher resides in the area, but is not a member of the Cosmo City Baptist Church. She is aware of the crime problems and, therefore, considered the area as being a suitable case or "bounded system" from which data could be obtained (De Vos et al., 2005, p.272). The selection of the 11 participants was done by means of a purposeful method (Creswell, 2007).

Subsequent to the approval of the study proposal and after obtaining ethical clearance from the North-West University's Human Health Research Ethics Committees (HHREC: NWU-HS-2018-0048), the researcher met with the pastor of the Baptist Church for him to assist her with the recruitment of the victims of violent crimes who had expressed their experienced trauma. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were explained to him. The pastor introduced possible participants to the study by announcing the study to the church congregation and by distributing the consent letters. He identified those who were interested, were willing to talk about their experiences, and had at least a year of distancing since the trauma. He obtained contact numbers and the signed consent letters from them. After receipt of the consent letters, the researcher contacted willing participants, and the research process commenced.

The only participants who took part in the study were those who willingly agreed to discuss their experienced trauma and the possible growth that had flowed from it and gave written consent. The interviews were done at the church premises or at another convenient location and at a convenient time, which were arranged with the participants. Before the in-depth interviews, a short presentation was done by the researcher to introduce the topic, relevant concepts, and the ethical principles of the study and to make sure that the inclusion criteria had been met. The profile of the participants is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Biographical information of the participants
Biographical information of the participants

Participants interviewed	Gender	Age	Home language	Culture	Level of education
1	Male	22	IsiXhosa	Xhosa	Matric
2	Female	21	IsiZulu	Zulu	Diploma
3	Female	48	IsiZulu	Zulu	Diploma
4	Female	60	Sepedi	Sepedi	Bachelor's degree
5	Female	48	Setswana	Tswana	Grade 11
6	Female	58	Setswana	Tswana	Higher certificate
7	Male	38	Setswana	Tswana	Matric
8	Male	54	Venda/ Setswana	Venda	Grade 7
9	Male	66	Tsonga	Tsonga	Matric
10	Female	49	Setswana	Tswana	Postgraduate degree
11	Male	54	Sepedi	Sepedi	Bachelor's degree

Inclusion criteria were that participants:

- had reported experienced trauma due to violent crime;
- had experienced the trauma from one to two years ago;
- had English proficiency to meaningfully complete the PTGI;
- were willing to engage in a discussion of PTG related to their traumatic experiences;
- could communicate in an African language in which the researcher was proficient; and
- did not know the researcher.

Exclusion criteria were that participants:

- had no experience of trauma due to violent crime;
- had experienced trauma more recently than one year ago;
- had inadequate English proficiency;
- were unwilling to discuss their trauma-related PTG;
- could not communicate in an African language familiar to the researcher; and
- knew the researcher personally.

Data collection

A short biographical questionnaire was used to obtain descriptive information from participants. Gender, age, culture, language, and level of education questions were posed (see Table 2 for the biographical information obtained).

Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996)

The PTGI was given to the participants to measure their levels of PTG, and the researcher assisted them, where necessary. The PTGI was used as a source of information, not as a data-gathering instrument for statistical analysis purposes; therefore, the participants' levels of PTG as indicated by the PTGI contributed to the analysis and interpretation of data qualitatively obtained. Participants received full feedback about their scores on the PTGI.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) developed the PTGI as an instrument for assessing positive outcomes reported by persons who had experienced traumatic events. It is a 21-item scale, including factors of new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spirituality, and appreciation for life. The PTGI has well-established validity and reliability and its ability to capture the multidimensional quality of personal growth has been documented. The PTGI demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 in the study by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996). Respondents answer the 21-item measure on a five-point Likert scale (0 = no change; 5 = very great degree of change). The PTGI was used in South African research by Walker-Williams (2012), who found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 for traumatised women. PTG is modestly related to optimism and extraversion, and the scale appears to have utility in determining how successful individuals coping with the aftermath of trauma are in constructing or strengthening their perceptions of themselves, others, and the meaning of events (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

In-depth individual interviews

In-depth interviews were the primary means of collecting data from the participants, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The present study used a qualitative in-depth interview format in order to get an informed perspective on the research question related to the post-traumatic growth of victims of violent crime (Jugder, 2016). Qualitative interviews give insight

into a social phenomenon, as they allow the respondents to reflect and reason on the subject in different ways (Folkestadt, 2008). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) state that such interviews are preferable, since they allow participants to speak freely and in their own way about their experiences with the phenomenon of PTG.

During the interviews, the researcher introduced herself and used responses such as active listening, minimal encouragement, and emotional support throughout. She made sure that the participants had adequate freedom to convey their experiences without the researcher's view being imposed on them. (For example, the participants were encouraged to give their own definition of post-traumatic growth.) Probes were used to obtain more in-depth and complete information or to clarify a response. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked each interviewee whether he/she wanted to add anything else, how he/she had experienced the interview process, and whether he/she was emotionally and otherwise well after exploring the topic (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). If any person indicated discomfort he/she was comforted and offered a follow-up counselling discussion with a trauma counsellor, who was willing to perform this service free of charge. The researcher arranged such contact. The in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in English, and when any participant indicated such a need, his/her African language was used for further exploration.

The participants were asked the following questions during the interview:

- Tell me, in your own words, what growth after trauma means to you.
- Please describe how your struggle with the trauma that you experienced may have led to post-traumatic growth in yourself.
- Please describe aspects in your coping with what has happened that made growth difficult.
- What aspects would you say have strongly enabled you to have PTG, **or** what would you say has really hindered your having PTG?

In order to minimise the bias that the religious setting might have, probing was done for other factors concerning PTG, especially in shared experiences in which religious features were prominent.

After the interviews participants were given a break and some refreshments. The PTGI was then introduced to them as a measure to complement the understanding of their PTG. Thereafter the researcher scored it and in a short discussion gave individual feedback. The PTGI was positively experienced by all participants.

Data analysis

The method of analysis chosen for the study was a qualitative approach of thematic content analysis followed by Braun and Clarke (2006). According to the authors, thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. In addition, this approach facilitates an investigation of the interview data from two perspectives: firstly, from the data-driven perspective and a perspective on coding in an inductive way; secondly, from the research question perspective to check whether the data are consistent with the research questions and provide sufficient information (Jugder, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2006) also explain that themes or patterns within data can be identified either in an inductive bottom-up (see Frith & Gleeson, 2004) or in a theoretical, deductive top-down way (see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). This study made use of the data-driven perspective or the inductive bottom-up approach.

Phases of thematic analysis

The data were collected through recorded (with permission from the interviewees) in-depth interviews with victims of violent crime from Cosmo City Baptist Church. After that, the data were prepared for analysis by the researcher by transcribing the recordings into written texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following six phases of thematic analysis were used:

Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the transcription of the interviews by reading (and rereading) the transcriptions and listening to the recordings.

Secondly, once familiar with the data, the researcher started identifying preliminary codes, which are the features of the data that appear interesting and meaningful.

The third step in the process was the start of the interpretive analysis of the collated codes by identifying emerging themes.

The fourth step was the refinement of the themes.

Defining and naming the themes constituted the fifth step of the analysis, where the researcher had to further refine and define the themes and potential sub-themes from the data.

After this stage had been completed, the transcriptions, their coding, and the themes identified were sent to an independent co-coder. She provided a full report on her findings, and then, in a final telephonic discussion, agreement was reached between the researcher and co-coder regarding thematic results.

The last step was producing a report, where the researcher transformed her analysis into a coherent narrative about the topic by means of vivid and compelling extract examples relating to the themes, to the research question, and to the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness

The personal paradigm from which the researcher approached the study was the social construction perspective, according to which truth is socially constructed within live contexts in which individuals interact as active social agents (Creswell, 2009).

Graneheim and Lundman (2003) indicate that the research findings should be as **trustworthy** as possible and that every study must be evaluated in relation to the procedures used to generate findings. The interviews of the present study that were conducted with consenting participants were transcribed, analysed, and sent to the promoter and a co-coder for verification of the thematic findings and the credibility of the results. Aspects of rigour (Tracy, 2010) were adhered to because there was correspondence between the literature review of the study and the findings obtained from the interviews. The sample size of the study was appropriate, and although data saturation occurred with nine participants, due to more people wishing to participate, the researcher interviewed and analysed the stories of 11 participants. The appropriate procedures were followed when recruiting participants and collecting data from them. The nature of the study was sensitive, and care was taken to ensure the well-being of participants, while an appropriate referral service was available, if needed. Sincerity was upheld by the researcher reflecting on personal values and beliefs in the writing of the research report, by presenting the research procedures, findings, and limitations in a transparent manner, and by giving credit to authors who were cited. Member checking was done with participants to ensure the credibility of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher was mindful of research participants' rights, took into consideration the participants' needs, and treated them with respect and dignity at all times. In South Africa, there are diverse cultures, and the researcher attempted to understand the participants' views based on their culture. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (2008) indicates that a researcher in the field of psychology shall develop, maintain, and encourage high standards of professional competence and ensure that research participants are protected from professional practices that fall short of international and best practice standards. Similarly, Allen (2011) mentions four general principles for ethical research: respect for the dignity and rights of people (beneficence), justice (veracity), autonomy (fidelity), and non-maleficence (responsibility). These principles were upheld in this study at all times. The participants were fully aware of their rights and gave written consent for their

participation. Permission for the research was obtained from the pastor of the Cosmo City Baptist Church and from the NWU (NWU-HS-2018-00480).

The researcher gave the participants breaks in the research session, when necessary, and made sure that the participants were comfortable at all times. The room was private, well ventilated, and free from distractions. The vulnerability of the research participants was noted, acknowledged, and treated with care. In the unlikely event of a participant, during the discussion of his/her experience, showing that he/she was not as emotionally contained as he/she thought, the researcher used her counselling experience and skills to support and contain the person and to steer the interview to a calm conclusion. If so preferred by the participant, an urgent session was arranged with an available counsellor.

The literature background to the study and the research methodology used were described above. The report on the qualitative research follows below.

Results and Discussion

Since the PTG construct of Calhoun and Tedeschi (2008) formed the theoretical framework of the research, the qualitative results were presented in line with the five post-traumatic growth components identified by the authors, namely, relating to others, appreciation for life, personal strength, spirituality, and finding new possibilities. Factors that either enabled or impeded post-traumatic growth were discussed. The results obtained by the participants on the PTGI for each growth component were also integrated in the discussion. The data obtained from the interviews with N=11 participants provided the following findings:

The factors that enabled PTG of participants

Theme 1: Relating to others

Relational growth emerged as a primary theme from thematic analysis. Violent crime victims grew to understand their traumatic experiences and to devise ways to deal with their experiences, for which they received help and support from their family and friends (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). This first domain of PTG showed that most of the participants were supported by their loved ones and people who helped them after the violent attacks.

The participants commented as follows: (P1) *I had family support, friends and the support from the church.* (P2) *I think quite fairly my brother and my mom were the first people I wanted to call. Then there was a man who stopped his car and he was holding an axe in his hand and chased the guys and tried to catch them.* (P3) *I could talk about this incident to my colleagues at work, my late husband and my sisters...so my sisters advised me...you must be vigilant... make sure you are home and safe.* (P4) *I think closeness from my family and friends...the counselling from pastor and the congregation are the aspects that played a role in the PTG.* (P5) *The support of my family, my partner and my friends made*

me to grow from my trauma.(P6) The family and my boss supported me to heal...It happened long time ago and I am trying to forget now...I can cope because of my family and friends. (P8) You know it was not easy but I hoped that one day I will live and tell my story to my grandchildren.(P11) Yes, family support is part of a very strong base...and knowing that everybody is there for you ...it is nice.

PTGI results

Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11 scored high with regard to relatedness on the PTGI. The results showed that these participants seemed to experience the following relational growth aspects: they felt that they could count on people in times of trouble, they had a greater sense of closeness to others, they were more willing to express their emotions, they had compassion for others, they put more effort into their relationships, they learnt how supportive other people were, and they accepted that they needed others in times of difficulty. The PTGI scores of the participants largely supported the quality of growth that they shared in the interviews relating to their relationships with others.

Most participants appeared to be **coping** after their traumatic event, and social support seemed to be a means of coping and a resource for victims towards post-traumatic growth (Thabet, 2017). As a result of **self-disclosure** about their feelings and negative experiences, the victims experienced relatedness to others, as well as feelings of closeness and bonding in interpersonal relationships (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2008). Relationships with others based on a **sense of attachment** were important to victims after they had experienced the trauma (Nakagawa et al., 2016). Furthermore, it appeared as if family support helped the victims to deal with the traumatic events, and family support was found to be a mediating factor in the relations between **hope** and PTG (Zhou & Wu, 2018).

An explanation of the salutary role of social support is given by Taylor (2011b), who found that people involved in networks of close relationships within which a sense of closeness existed showed more stress tolerance and enhanced coping skills, better health and immune function, and faster recovery from either physical or psychological adversity. Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, and Steward (2000) report that social support reduces negative affect during stress and builds psychological adjustment that, in turn, promotes positive coping and other positive adjustment behaviour. Social support as a resource for coping with stress apparently operates through a buffering effect that inhibits the neurological response to severe stress (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2010; Taylor, 2011 a & b).

Theme 2: Appreciation for life

Appreciation for life emerged as the second most prominent growth component in the participants. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) state that victims of trauma tend to have more

appreciation for life, they experience a shift in priorities and redefine what they consider important, and they have a greater appreciation for the small things in life.

This was clear from participants' statements: (P4) *There is life after this experience.* (P6) *I was scared that I am going to die...precisely my screaming saved my life...I have told myself that I can't live in fear... I am happy to be alive.* (P8) *What happened to me will make me live my life to the fullest...Other people didn't live to tell their stories... I don't blame anyone and life goes on. I believe I was given second chances in life...If you go through the painful experiences like mine, it doesn't mean that you will forget but you embrace life as it comes...I always tell my grandchildren about this and they say...granddad you are strong and a survivor.* (P9) *They nearly killed me...my ancestors protected me that day. I thanked my ancestors to be alive.* (P10) *I have decided to move on with my life...I see life in a positive way as compared to before.* (P11) *To live life better...I just became a different person...I have experienced some newness in me.*

PTGI results

Most participants' scores showed appreciation for life and indicated their growth: they changed their priorities about what was important in life, they had an appreciation for the value of their own life, and they now appreciated each day for what it was. The scores of most participants on the appreciation for life component of the PTGI were high and more positive than what was expressed in the discussions.

It seemed that these violent crime victims had a sense of vulnerability, but had come to terms with the reality that they could not predict or control certain life events (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2008). In sharing the aspects of their PTG, features of optimism and resilience could be observed, in agreement with the view expressed by Haidt (2006) that optimism plays a role in PTG and with that of Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) that resilience contributes to the emotional adjustment that underpins PTG. Furthermore, participants' disclosures about a renewed appreciation for life showed how they had found meaning in their experiences and even more meaning in life after having nearly lost it. This resonates with the views of Lechner, Tennen, and Affleck (2009) and of Sharpe and Curran (2006) about how meaning and benefit finding can flow from experiencing trauma.

Theme 3: Personal strength

Personal strength emerged in participants as part of their PTG. A sense of personal strength is the perception by traumatised victims of being capable of dealing with future challenges and adversities based on the awareness that if it had been possible for them to overcome their trauma, they could handle other challenges in their lives (Duan & Bu, 2017).

This is what participants said: (P1) *The traumatic changes that I have experienced in myself...basically what I went through has taught me to move pass the experience and has taught me to be aware... I feel like I have grown from the post-traumatic experience. It is self-realization, just pushing myself to accept what has happened... and made peace with the fact that I went through such an experience. As traumatic as it was...I got through the experience. Also my greatest support was listening to music...I used my music as a therapeutic method, which also helped me to get pass this trauma.*(P2) *I think I realised that I am able to stay calm even in high risk areas...I think realising that I am able to overcome my fear and even if I'm scared...I don't know it's like a natural reaction. I think that if I panic I might do something that will harm me or someone else.* (P3) *I have learnt to be strong...when you are strong you let go of the bad things that happened to you... I sometimes think about it but then it doesn't affect me anymore...You know, also talking about it, it makes it better for me. I was brave because I couldn't talk to them while they were pointing a gun at me...I did not know I am a strong person... but it is my nature to be strong. I can tolerate difficult things in my life... I have moved on.* (P4) *I am fine now; I even forgave the people...I even forgot how I felt. It is true what they say, times heals the broken wounds. So growth after trauma means when I am able to control my feelings such as anger, guilt and fear... I am stronger than before this bad thing happen to me...* (P8) *I guess I am a strong person...It was difficult but now I am fine. I am stronger than before. It is my nature to be strong. I want to surround myself with positive things.* (P10) *I won't hold on to those things that were mistrust to me or frustrated me...I have decided to move on with my life...I was bitter, angry, not trusting and lack of trust. I lived with those kinds of issues...but I decided I cannot hold on to that...I have to move on...*(P11) *I have developed and live life better... since trauma I have even gain confidence.*

PTGI results

Nearly all participants' results indicated that they had apparently experienced change in their awareness of personal strength. According to their scores, they had more feelings of self-reliance, they now knew that they had the ability to handle difficulties, they were better able to accept the way things worked out, and they discovered that they were stronger than they had thought they were. The PTGI scores of participants on this component were fairly in line with their shared experiences of being newly aware of their personal strength, although more optimistic in frequency than the discussion showed.

An observation during the interviews was that the extroverted participants reported on their growth in personal strength, while the more introverted persons gave no indications of growth in this theme. This is in line with the findings by Collier (2016) and with those of McCrae (2011) who found that extroverts were more involved in strengths confirming social activities and, therefore, had a stronger perception of their strengths. Similar to Theme 2,

features of resilience were shared by participants in describing the discovery of their strength. Bonnano (2004) and Zautra and Reich (2011) remark on the features PTG shares with resilience in human adaptation. The participants seemed to have more self-confidence in, or self-reliance on, their ability to cope than before, and it can be assumed that they had developed coping skills and other behavioural skills that they had not had before (Straume & Vitterso, 2012).

Theme 4: Spirituality

Some participants in this study seemed to have grown towards a renewed sense of spiritual empowerment as a result of their individual confrontations with traumatic events (Ramos & Leal, 2013). Forgiveness emerged as a major component of their spirituality that liberated them from the negative feelings and memories of their trauma (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Some of the participants were using spirituality to cope with their traumatic events (Ironson & Kremer, 2011).

The participants said: (P1) *You know...just pushing myself to move pass my experience and forgive those who caused this traumatic experience.* (P4) *I am fine, now I even forgave the people ... I just pray that one day they must repent and know God.*(P6) *God is there to protect us.*(P8) *God was with me after the incident.*(P9) *I kept on thinking, I nearly died today and my ancestors really protected me...I have forgiven them in order for me to heal... God will sort them out for me.*(P10) *I have forgiven those people even if I don't know them.* (P11) *Church became a regular thing for me... church become a community where you forget about your problem.*

PTGI results

All participants scored slightly higher on this subscale of the PTGI. The results indicated that the participants had a better understanding of their spirituality and that some had deepened in their religious faith. Participants' PTGI scores on spirituality supported the growth on which they reported in the discussion, although the frequency in the PTGI was higher.

Coping with the trauma experience by means of their faith or spiritual belief systems was strongly expressed by some participants. They felt that they could use spirituality not only as coping mechanism, but also to develop PTG. Ironson and Kremer (2011) wrote extensively on spiritual coping and on how spirituality enabled individuals to cope with the trauma of HIV. Nelson (2011) found that religious coping, religious openness, participation in religious practices, and a readiness to face existential questions were related to PTG, and Askay and Magyar-Russell (2009) state that spiritual beliefs help victims in restructuring their world view. Forgiveness was an outstanding feature of the spiritual aspect of PTG reported by these participants, which is in line with what Hafnider, Chang and Lin (2012) reports: they found that forgiveness mediated the relationship between PTG and spirituality.

Theme 5: New possibilities

Finding new possibilities emerged from thematic analysis as a last theme. Lindstrom et al. (2013) indicate that during the process of struggling with the trauma, the victims discover new choices for their lives in several domains. However, in this study, new possibilities emerged as PTG in only two participants.

The participants made the following statements: (P9) *I also changed my job.* (P11) *I think I am in a different space now. So, aspects of that would be like engaging and attending to social activities. The church becomes a regular thing for me and enrolling for the gym. I revived my sports but not at the competition level and changing my social circles. I just become a different person and experienced some newness of life.*

PTGI results

Six participants had high scores regarding new possibilities. Their growth in this component of PTG seemed to be characterised by the development of new interests; participants established new paths for their lives, they were able to do better things with their lives, new opportunities became available to them, and they were more likely to try to change things that needed changing. Again, the PTGI scores of the participants were more positive about finding new possibilities than was evident from their shared experiences.

According to Calhoun and Tedeschi (2008), the creation of a new journey for their lives that is related to the perception of a **new philosophy**, that changes past beliefs and core assumptions, and that opens new possibilities and new opportunities that did not exist before the trauma is the essence of this PTG component. Rendon (2015) states that trauma victims seem to feel that their lives have **more meaning** towards a different life journey of **new possibilities** (Rendon, 2015).

Impeding factors for PTG of the participants

There were quite a number of impeding factors that had an inhibiting influence on participants' post-traumatic growth.

Theme 1: Relating to others

Participants made these remarks: (P1) *Family at home accused me for being irresponsible and not being aware of my surroundings and a lot of blaming from them.* (P2) *I am just not a people's person I just kept to myself. So, when things happen sometimes I want to keep to myself. That can be very hindering sometimes, maybe even feel like you are alone but then you are not really alone, you have people who are willing to help.* (P9) *My family told me to avoid this dodgy place because one day I will meet the wrong people and hurt or kill me.* (P10) *I would often ask permission to leave early from work thinking that it not safe for me to*

arrive late at home. It is not safe for my kids to stay with the helper only when I am not around.

The outcomes of the thematic qualitative research revealed that some victims needed family support, but did not perceive the support as being available (Morton, White & Young, 2015). It also seemed that some participants were being blamed for not being responsible enough to be careful of their surroundings, which raised feelings of guilt and helplessness in the victims (Patrika & Tseliou, 2016). Personality traits such as the introvertedness of the victims played a role in how they coped with the traumatic aftermath (Roohafza et al., 2016). Introversion might have affected their response to the social support given; however, they still needed support from their loved ones when they found themselves in difficult situations.

Theme 2: Appreciation for life

Participant remarks were as follows: (P2) *I was just thinking that anything could have happened to me.* (P3) *I would think about the incident and what if something happened to me.* (P6) *I was scared that I am going to die.* (P7) *I have not experienced growth or healing...the issue of trauma is the issue of not trusting people anymore...you become careful with the people.* (P8) *I believe I have seen the worst. I was ill-treated and abused in my life. I even have an eye injury.* (P9) *I had a bad experience of being beaten by two men. I hated anyone of that colour skin, I was angry at people who reminded me of them because they nearly killed me.* (P10) *So, that struggle made me not to trust a person moving in the vicinity where we are staying. I was like bitter to the community especially my neighbours. I was bitter, angry and had lack of trust. I lived with those kinds of issues for some few years.*

These participants ruminated on the feared outcomes of their trauma, and they shared the recurring negative feelings of fear, anger, bitterness, hatred, and loss of trust, all indications of how the trauma shattered the assumptive world that framed their understanding of reality, their normal coping functions, and their feelings of being safe in a predictable world (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Walker-Williams, 2012). According to Piipo (2016), the loss of trust due to trauma is a strong impeding factor in PTG, since trust is a basic human need and essential in understanding the basic fabric of society.

Theme 3: Personal strength

This is what participants had to say: (P1) *Another aspect of not moving towards the PTG was the feeling of helplessness, not being able to handle the situation myself.* (P3) *I couldn't talk to them while they were pointing a gun at me. While I am sleeping, I would think about the incident that, what if something happened to me. Sometimes at nights I would dream about it.* (P4) *What really kept me for a while from PTG was that I was left with one year to be a pensioner and the company I was working for had no pension fund, no provident fund and that made me sad.* (P5) *When you are a victim of crime you always have these feelings*

of suspiciousness of other people and it is not a nice feeling. (P6) After the bad experience I blamed and was angry at myself. (P8) It was very traumatic for me...I even have an eye injury. Sometimes I would have nightmares about the things that happened to me. (P10) The trauma that I had, causes anger and mistrust... It was very painful.

Also, these participants appeared to ruminate often about the traumatic events and experience the negative emotions that flow from such rumination (Moberly & Watkins, 2008). However, Kamijo and Yukawa (2014) state that rumination can serve a function in the process of cognitive restructuring after trauma and in eventually making meaning of the experiences. The participants shared that they still experienced some distress due to the trauma; in this regard, Cadell, Regehr and Hemsworth (2003) remark on emotional distress as an impediment to PTG.

Theme 4: Spirituality

Spirituality and religion seemed to have no hindering influences on the PTG of the participants.

Theme 5: New possibilities

Participants revealed the following: (P4) *I even thought of paying revenge but I'm not quite sure what I would do. (P7) I know but this trauma has changed me I was never a violent or angry person. I am a police officer, I think it is the kind of job that I am doing. If I was doing a different job maybe I could have been healed. Trauma could have been better. Now and then you will attend to a person being attacked. Yes, one thing for sure I have hope that it will pass. (P8) You know, I hated and had a lot of anger towards every person of that colour skin who looked like those men. I would sometimes think of revenge. (P11) At times it will be so fresh that you have a panic attack and so it makes things difficult. It is a bit of the struggle being in the same environment where this thing happened.*

It can be speculated that these participants have not found benefit in what happened to them and still struggle with making meaning of their experiences. According to Pakenham (2011), such individuals will equally struggle to obtain PTG. Additionally, the negative emotions expressed by them may indicate unresolved post-traumatic stress symptoms such as thought intrusion and rumination, which may strongly inhibit their PTG (Hobfoll, 2011).

Concluding Discussion

In this study about the post-traumatic growth (PTG) of victims of violent crime, two aims were met, namely, to explore the PTG of the participants through interviews and qualitative thematic content analysis and to measure and qualitatively interpret their PTG by means of the PTGI. The results of the research were that the participants reported PTG both qualitatively and quantitatively. They also communicated factors in their coping with the

trauma experienced that impeded or hindered their PTG. Growth was reported by participants in the PTG components of relationships with others, appreciation for life, personal strengths, spirituality, and finding new possibilities for them. The scores obtained by the participants on the PTGI were qualitatively compared to what they shared in the interviews, and surprisingly, their scores were more positive about their PTG on all components of growth than what was reflected in their discussions. The researcher suspects that participants found it more difficult to express and verbalise their growth-related thoughts than agree or disagree with the statements given to them in the questionnaire. The use of English in the discussion of sensitive issues for people from African cultures and languages could have added to the difficulty in expression and to the preference for responding to given statements. Impeding factors were experienced in their relations to others, appreciation for life, personal strengths, and the finding of new possibilities. It is interesting that, for spirituality, they only experienced growth.

The results of this research agreed with what was reported in older research into PTG such as that of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996, 2004, 2008), Joseph and Linley (2006), and Janoff-Bulman (2004). Two qualitative observations, apart from the PTG that was discussed in the components of PTG, were that PTG in the participants was manifested in various ways and differed from one individual to the next (Lindstrom et al., 2013) and that PTG was experienced despite still struggling with some negative outcomes of the trauma experienced (Dekel, Ein-Dor & Solomon, 2012).

In reporting the findings of this study, however, note was also taken of more recent opinions raised about PTG. Davis and Nolen-Hoeksema (2009) caution that self-reported PTG should not be accepted at face value and that various flaws can arise in the scientific credibility of such research. The authors suggest that, instead of exploring “growth” experienced after trauma, people could be asked to describe their life goals before the trauma and compare these to post-trauma goals within the five components of PTG. Additionally, they propose that a distinction be made between benefits and PTG, with the latter being viewed as significant positive post-traumatic changes in commitments and life goals. Along the same lines, Pakenham (2011) calls for a reconceptualisation of PTG as sense making and meaning finding in the areas of PTG. Pakenham links this argument to the original thoughts of Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) that sense or meaning making is integral to the cognitive processing of trauma-related information and experiences. Sense making, thus, involves revisions of trauma-shattered schemas that create comprehensibility.

Nonetheless, significant reports of PTG were obtained from the 11 participants who were involved in this study, and these were supported by their scores on the PTGI. The research question was answered, and the aims set to do so were realised, as the factors

that either enabled or impeded PTG in victims of violent crimes could be identified by qualitatively exploring their shared lived experiences in this regard.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of the study were as follows:

- The study was conducted among a small number of victims of violent crime and also in one particular race of participants. The limitation was that other races of different cultures could have similar or different PTG results, but this was not explored by this study. Such research is recommended.
- The study was conducted with victims of violent crime. The question arises whether the PTG of victims of other forms of trauma would be similar or different.
- Self-reporting was another limitation that was encountered in the study, and it is recommended that both the victim of trauma and a significant other in his/her life be involved in a future study to qualitatively explore the PTG of such victims.
- The fluctuation of psychosocial well-being after trauma is a well-known fact. It is, thus, recommended that longitudinal research involving the same group of participants be conducted.
- The PTGI was in English; in future research, it is recommended that the scale be translated into the language of the participants.

Researcher's Reflection

The researcher found the study of post-traumatic growth fulfilling. She understood the participants' experiences because she had personally also been a victim of violent crime, and she had experienced PTG. The research procedure imposed a heavy schedule involving conducting a workshop to introduce participants to the PTG construct, conducting interviews, administering and scoring the PTGI, and sharing feedback and scoring. This was done 11 times.

The researcher is deeply grateful to the research participants for their cooperation throughout the research process. They made it easy for the researcher to conduct her study, and there were no challenges that the researcher could not handle. Therefore, it was a valuable learning process, a privilege, and a most rewarding experience for the researcher to study this group of victims of violent crime.

The researcher thinks it is worth mentioning that some participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their experiences, feelings, and perceptions in this personal way and stated that they felt a renewed awareness of their potential to grow from their trauma. They felt committed to furthering their own PTG. Particularly Participant 7 reported back to the researcher after six months, saying that he had entered into long-term

therapy, which he found very meaningful. He expressed his deepest gratitude to the researcher for this opportunity he had been offered.

Conclusion

This study successfully achieved what it set out to do. The narrative that flowed from the shared life experiences of the participants in this study reminded the researcher of what Nietzsche said: that which does not kill me makes me stronger (cited by Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2009).

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Keywords: post-traumatic growth, post-traumatic stress, South Africa, victims, trauma, violent crimes

In this chapter, the conclusions drawn from the study, in line with the research aims, are discussed, after which the limitations of the study are specified and recommendations for future research are made.

Main Conclusions from the Study

The research question that steered the study was as follows: what factors that either enable or inhibit PTG in victims of violent crimes can be identified by qualitatively exploring their shared lived experiences in this regard and by evaluating their responses on the PTGI? The aims were to answer the question by:

- qualitatively, by means of interviews, identifying either enabling or inhibiting factors for PTG from the shared lived experiences of victims a year or more after having experienced violent crime; and
- measuring the PTG of participants with the PTGI in order to use their scores to identify those who reported PTG and those who did not and to qualitatively analyse the results. The individual scores would also be discussed with participants.

The research question was satisfactorily answered through the successful realisation of the aims. The main conclusions were as follows:

Firstly, data obtained from the victims of violent crime (N=11) through interviews was qualitatively analysed by means of thematic content analysis using the method of Braun and Clarke (2006). Despite being a fairly old method of qualitative data analysis, in this study, the Braun and Clarke model of analysis proved successful in identifying clear and unambiguous themes of PTG in the participants, as well as themes pointing to factors that impeded or hindered PTG.

Secondly, although the interview questions posed to participants were not framed by the PTG components conceptualised by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), in the thematic analysis, it was decided to identify themes that reflected features of the PTG components. This proved to be successful, and the identified themes showed the PTG of participants in relations with others, appreciation for life, personal strengths, spirituality, and finding new possibilities. One does, however, wonder what themes would have emerged from the data if the PTG framework had not been used.

Thirdly, in contrast to PTG, some participants reported hindering factors that impeded their growth in relations with others, appreciation for life, personal strengths, and finding new possibilities. This was an interesting finding, but nevertheless in line with the assumptions of Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) that it is possible for PTG to occur concurrently with traumatic stress symptoms and also for PTG to fluctuate according to the individual's intra- and interpersonal experiences preceding trauma (Dekel, Ein-Dor & Solomon, 2012).

In the fourth place, although the PTGI is a reliable and valid measurement of PTG and is generally successfully used for this purpose, it was surprising to find that the scores of the participants on the PTGI showed a more optimistic or positive picture of their PTG than what they reported in the interviews (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Language could have played a role, since participants were all from African cultures. It can also be speculated that it is simply easier and takes less cognitive effort to respond to clear statements about an issue than to formulate descriptions about emotionally laden experiences. Furthermore, in responding to written statements, one has more control over one's reactions than during the verbalisation of stress-related thoughts and feelings around a post-traumatic experience.

Conclusions Drawn from the Literature Study

- The incidence rate of violent crime in South Africa is alarming and, indeed, a cause of grave concern to all who care for, and are involved in, guarding the moral fabric of the nation. However, the phenomenon of fear of crime (FoC) that presents itself as a dark shadow of the incidence of real crime and violence that people and societies experience was an eye-opener. FoC seems to border on an epidemic in crime-ridden areas and has all the features of trauma itself. Fear of crime has become a major cause of prevailing anxiety in individuals, families, and neighbourhoods (Eagle, 2015; Jackson, 2004).
- The clinical outcome of trauma and the impact of violent crime-related trauma on the biopsychosocial health and well-being of victims have been extensively researched. However, the age-old wisdom that pain and suffering can have benefits, bring about meaning in life, and lead to personal growth and a deepening of the valuing of life and limb has only recently become a field of research. The PTG construct introduced by Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006, 2008) introduced a new paradigmatic approach to the study of the outcome of trauma.
- Trauma may beneficially lead to a deeper sense of self, greater closeness in relationships with others, and a different philosophy of life. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), as well as Lindstrom et al. (2013), found manifestations of personal growth and meaning making after adversity, evident in victims reporting more confidence, skills, and strengths after the trauma and a greater sense of self-control, emotional hardiness, life perspective, and emotional independence. Yet victims were also aware of being vulnerable and humanly fragile.
- Based on the results of research such as the findings mentioned above, Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) conceptualised PTG components as growth after the trauma in personal strength, relationships with others, changed priorities, changed philosophy of life, and a deeper sense of spirituality (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

- An interesting feature of PTG is that it can occur concurrently with the experience of recurring rumination about the traumatic incident, distress in reflection on it, and difficulty in rebuilding the assumptive world through reinterpretation and processing of trauma into a restructuring of one's core beliefs (Janoff-Bulman, 2006). It would seem that the gradual restructuring of core beliefs and schemas and the experience of aspects of growth after a struggle with the trauma can bring about a reconstruction of a personal narrative or identity life script (Cann et al., 2011).

Conclusions from Research

- The research design chosen for this study, namely, an exploratory descriptive qualitative design, proved to be successful in obtaining sufficient and appropriate data to realise the aims and answer the research question. Data saturation was achieved after the analysis of nine interview transcriptions, but all 11 participants' stories were analysed and gave a rich picture of post-traumatic experiences and growth. As mentioned before, the Braun and Clarke (2006) model of thematic content analysis remains a good framework to work with in a qualitative study such as this (also see Nowell et al., 2017).
- Purposeful selection of the participants from the Cosmo City Baptist Church, with assistance of the pastor who fulfilled the recruitment role and who obtained informed consent, proved successful, although some bias due to the religious nature of this bounded case and context was a concern. The researcher probed the participants and, at times, steered them away from focusing on spiritual aspects that could lead to PTG. However, the church context seemed to be a source of security and emotional containment to these victims of violent crime, as it was the context where some of them first shared their traumatic experiences.
- The following conclusions were drawn pertaining to the results concerning the PTG of the participants:
 - Relating to others as a prominent theme in PTG was theoretically expected and is also in line with volumes of research indicating that social support is the most important source of assistance and psychosocial support to all people in times of stress and trauma.
 - Appreciation for life as a factor in PTG seemed to have underpinnings of optimism, resilience, and benefit finding or meaning making, which was surprising and yet supported by other empirical studies. These features of this PTG component were, however, more concrete and less concerned with existential awareness than the conceptualisation provided by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004).
 - The PTG component of personal strength of these participants was theoretically very close to the conceptualisation of Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), in the sense

of perceived changes in the self, such as being stronger, more confident, more alive and – overall – a better person, with the ability to forgive the offender and deal with personal destructive feelings.

- Spirituality as a PTG factor for these participants was theoretically close to identical to the description given by the original authors (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2008). The participants deeply valued their religious connections, and a sense of strengthened closeness to a higher being was felt, which enabled them to forgive. Forgiveness was seen as a spiritual gift that they received to give to those who had harmed them.
- Finding new possibilities as part of their PTG seemed to be a more challenging aspect for the participants in this study. The participants who reported new possibilities found these in changed life contexts such as work, sport, and social activities. Changes in life goals were not described. One wonders about the relation between PTG and future-mindedness in victims of violent crime such as those in this study.
- As far as the findings regarding factors that impeded or hindered the participants in this study are concerned, the following were included:
 - Complicated relationships with others in which blame played a role, personal reservedness, and a lack of self-disclosure appeared to impede PTG in some participants. Feelings of guilt, helplessness, and aloneness or detachedness from supportive closeness seemed to be consequences.
 - Rumination or recurring fears related to the incident of trauma and difficulty in dealing with feelings of anger, bitterness, hatred, and loss of trust in humanity impeded the appreciation for life aspect of PTG in some participants. The shattering of their assumptive world and the inability to cognitively reconstruct their beliefs and reinterpret their experiences appeared to be inhibiting factors.
 - Personal strength as PTG component was ostensibly marred by emotional distress due to rumination. It is interesting that Kamijo and Yukawa (2014) saw the possibility that rumination might underpin some of the cognitive restructuring process after trauma in order to eventually find meaning.
 - Spirituality exhibited no impeding aspects.
 - As stated before, finding new possibilities as part of their PTG seemed challenging for some of the participants, and again, lack of benefit finding and meaning making linked to continued negative emotions about the trauma were factors that impeded their PTG.
 - Finally, the findings that emerged as particularly interesting were that PTG manifested in these participants in different ways and with strong individual variations, that PTG manifested differently from how it had been conceptualised by

the original authors, and that PTG was experienced in conjunction with features of post-traumatic stress.

Limitations of the Study

The following were limitations of the research, despite the fact that the study was successful in realising its aims:

- The study was conducted among a small number of victims of violent crime and also in one particular race of participants. The limitation was that other races of different cultures could have similar or different PTG results, a possibility that was not explored by this study.
- The study was conducted with victims of violent crime. The question arises whether the PTG of victims of other forms of trauma would be similar or different.
- Self-reporting was another limitation of the study, and it is recommended that both the victim of violent crime and a significant other in his/her life be included in future research on PTG.
- The fluctuation of psychosocial well-being after trauma is a well-known fact. It is, thus, recommended that longitudinal research that includes the same group of participants be conducted.
- The PTGI was in English, and in future research, it is recommended that the scale be translated into the language of the participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further to the recommendations made above, the following is also suggested:

- The Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) could be validated for use in the African cultures of South Africa.
- The discrepancy found between the participants' scores on the PTGI and their shared experiences during the interviews concerning aspects related to the PTG components was surprising. Research exploring the PTGI statements in a qualitative manner could be valuable.
- Research as recommended by Davis and Nolen-Hoeksema (2009) through exploring people's pre-trauma life goals and comparing those to their post-trauma life goals in the five components of PTG could be undertaken, instead of exploring their "growth".
- Theorists such as Davis and Nolen-Hoeksema (2009) and Pakenham (2011) have called for a reconceptualisation of PTG along the lines of benefit finding and sense or meaning making in the five components of PTG, rather than the vague "growth" concept. Such research would contribute to theory building in the area of PTG.

- In this study, it was clear that PTG could exist concurrently with symptoms of post-traumatic stress and that there were individual variations in PTG. Quantitative research on the PTGI, together with a measure such as the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) for measuring symptoms of psychological distress, could be done. By means of statistical latent profile analysis software, the profiles of people based on their levels of PTG, as well as on their levels of psychological distress, could be determined. Such research could potentially give insight into the individual variations in these phenomena, as well as show how it would be possible for people to score high on PTG and post-traumatic stress conditions concurrently.

Personal Reflections

I was greatly honoured to take this path of personal new possibilities after experiencing a violent crime. I really felt the participants' traumatic experiences and growth when I analysed their interviews. Many of my feelings and thoughts were rekindled by hearing their experiences. I am a former psychiatric nurse, and I am now a registered counsellor. I have always wondered what makes certain people grow from their trauma and what inhibits others from growing. Some of the people ruminated on their traumatic experiences in front of me, and I respected that it was not easy to speak about their experiences of trauma. It took courage and determination for them to open up to me. I was very mindful of their vulnerabilities and sensitive to their needs.

When I registered for the MAPP programme, I had some idea of post-traumatic growth and was determined to study the concept in detail. I had to prepare myself mentally and physically for the study, and I needed to explore the question that I had been asking myself: what either enabled or inhibited me to recover from my trauma? At first, I began to search for literature that would support this question. Then I discovered the construct called "post-traumatic growth", and I was excited because, for the very first time, I would be studying a trauma-related concept that was the opposite of pathology.

I have learnt so much from my research participants and the research literature related to my study. I have further grown with my participants on the journey of recovery. I am grateful and feel fulfilled to have chosen this journey of contributing to the knowledge of positive psychology. Although the study was challenging throughout, I really appreciate that this has also prepared me for the next step in my academic life: that of a PhD study. My knowledge and experience working as a counsellor assisted me in supporting the participants in my research and in respectfully, but professionally, listening to and understanding their shared life experiences, coloured by the trauma they had undergone. I wish them well and hope that their lives will be healed and that their growth will, in time, soften the trauma they experienced.

Conclusion

This study was successful in studying the post-traumatic growth of a group of South Africans who had experienced violent crime. Although still struggling with the aftermath of trauma, they had experienced meaningful growth. A suitable conclusion would be the wisdom expressed by Martin Buber (as cited in Glazer, 1981) that “all suffering prepares the soul for vision”.

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